

The Power

In the town called Little Whinging, on the street called Privet Drive, in the house labeled number four, and in the smallest bedroom lay a ten year old boy. Anyone looking at the boy would say that he looked unhealthy. He was appallingly thin and always appeared tired. He had brilliant green eyes that shined with life, even through the weariness that drooped his lids. On his forehead was a scar that was reminiscent of a bolt of lightning.

Harry Potter could not tell you why he was so tired lately. For the past year he has been plagued with fatigue. When he first started appearing sickly, his teachers became worried and inquired to his aunt and uncle. That was when he moved into his room. Still, even without the confines of his cupboard, he had the unhealthy, weak look of someone who has been with out nourishment for some time now.

One day, Harry and family was enjoying one of Harry's home made breakfasts when the letterbox clanked. Vernon looked at his nephew, who looked relatively fit, and Harry got the message. When Harry picked up the mail, his eyes widened. He felt lighter than he had in ages. Leafing through it, he noticed one of the letters. It was made of some heavy parchment rather than paper, but what caught his attention was that it was addressed to him. And in green ink no less. Stunned, he walked back into the kitchen and handed his uncle his mail, keeping his own letter. Just as he was breaking the seal, his cousin Dudley, a mammoth of a boy, ruined it.

"Dad! Harry's got something!"

Quick as lightning, Vernon snatched the letter. Harry noticed the fearful expression his uncle gained from the letter and was beyond curious at what it contained, but was suddenly much more tired. He did not put up much of a fight over the letter.

Over the following week, more and more letters arrived for Harry, and not one made into Harry's hand. His uncle seemed to lose a piece of his sanity for each one. At last Vernon cracked and forced everyone into the car. They drove all day with no apparent destination. They stayed in a motel that night and left early the next morning. By that

night, they found themselves on a rock in the middle of the sea, in a small excuse of a shack. Harry, for some reason, was not at all sleepy, even though it was five till midnight. He supposed that might be because in five minutes it would be his birthday.

As soon as Dudley's watch turned twelve, the door to the shack shook with a resounding 'boom.' Harry sat up in surprise as his uncle came charging into the room armed with a rifle. Another 'boom' and the door came off completely, and in stepped the largest man Harry had ever seen. He had to stoop just to stand in the shack. What was more was that this man seemed to resonate with a powerful energy that made Harry smile through his confusion.

"I demand you leave at once sir! You are breaking and entering!"
'Wow, my uncle is and idiot.' Harry thought with wonder.

"Ah, shaddup Dursley, yeh great prune." And with that, he reached out and bent the rifle into a knot. "Now where's Harry. Ah, there yeh are. Happy Birthday."

"Excuse me, but...who are you?" It seemed impossible that this obviously powerful and important person was interested in Harry, let alone know when his birthday was.

The giant just chuckled and said, "true, I haven't introduced me self yet. The name's Rubeus Hagrid, but yeh can jest call meh Hagrid, everyone does. I'm Keeper of the Keys and the Grounds at Hogwarts. Yeh know all about Hogwarts, oh course."

"Sorry but no, I have no idea what you're talking about."

Vernon chose this time to regain his motor functions. "Now that's enough. I forbid you to tell him anything."

"Dursley!" The giant man, this Hagrid, seemed to be thinking hard. "But, blimey Harry, didn't you ever wonder where your parents learned it all?"

"All what?"

"DURSLEY! You mean to tell me that this boy knows nothin' about, about, anything?" Hagrid yelled in outrage and confusion.

Harry was offended. "Now that's not true, I know math and stuff."

"No I mean about our world, yeh parents' world, Your world." Hagrid clarified with desperation.

"Stop right there. You will tell him nothing else." Hagrid silenced Vernon with a glare.

"What world?" Harry was getting irritated with the guessing game.

"Yeh don't know what yeh are?" He looked crushed. Looking a bit closer, Harry noticed that the man was feeling pity for him, not something he appreciated.

"Apparently not. What am I?"

"Yeh're a wizard Harry."

The first thought in Harry's head was, 'the poor man.' But as he thought about it, he started to remember odd things that had happened when he was feeling a powerful emotion. Plus there was that odd ability to talk to snakes. He always felt stronger after one of these episodes, but that didn't make sense. If he was in fact doing it, wouldn't it have tired him out? Well, maybe it doesn't work that way.

"Yeah, I guess that makes sense. It explains a few things anyway."

"Right, well I guess it's time yeh got yer letter."

The letter itself was nothing special, but the booklist and required materials were interesting. "Hagrid, what does it mean, 'we await your owl'?"

"Oh, that reminds me." And he proceeded to pull parchment, a quill, ink, and a live owl out of pockets in his overcoat. He then wrote a letter, tied it to the owl, and hurled it out into the storm. Then he came back and sat on the couch as though it were perfectly ordinary.

"Oh, okay then." Harry supposed that must be how beings of the magical persuasion communicate over distances.

"And, where am I supposed to get all this stuff anyway?"

"Oh, don' ye worry 'bout tha'. I'll take yeh tomorrow up to London."

'You can get all this in London? Strange.'

"Now just wait one moment. He will not be attending some freakish school for freaks. We swore when we took him in we'd put a stop to all this rubbish. I'll admit there's something strange about the boy, probably nothing a good beating wouldn't have cured, but I will not have one in my house!" 'What?'

"You knew? You knew I'm a wizard and you didn't tell me?" 'Man I hate them.'

"Knew? Of course we knew. How could you not be, with what my dratted sister was. Everyone was so proud to have a 'witch' in the family. I was the only one to see her for what she was, a freak. Then, if you please, she goes and gets herself blown up and we got stuck with you; and I knew you'd be just the same, just as abnormal."

'Wow, do I sense some jealousy from Aunt Petunia...wait a moment.'

"Blown up! You said she died in a car crash!"

"Car crash! A car crash kill Lily and James Potter? Its an outrage!"

"He won't be going!"

"And I'd like to see a great muggle like you try and stop him!"

'Yeah, you great muggle. I wonder what a muggle is.'

"He will be attending Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, and he will be learning under the greatest headmaster the school has ever seen: Albus Dumbledore."

"I will not pay for some crackpot old fool to teach him magic tricks!"

"Never insult Albus Dumbledore in front of me." The way he said it just showed how mad he was. Then, he pulled out a pink umbrella and shot a yellow light at Dudley. Dudley screamed and turned his back. Poking out of his pajamas was a curly pig's tail. 'Appropriate.'

Vernon bellowed like a rhinoceros and dragged his family into the other room.

"Shouldn' have lost me temper. Do yeh min' not tellin' anyone at Hogwarts abou' tha'? I'm not really supposed to do magic, strictly speaking."

"Why not?"

"Well, I was expelled. In me third year."

Sensing an uncomfortable topic, Harry redirected the conversation.

"Well, what am I going to do now? You heard him, he won't pay for me to go."

"Don' worry about tha'. Do you think yer parents left yeh with nothin'?"

'Yeah, I kind of did.'

"How about some cake? 'Fraid I might have sat on it at some point, but it'll still taste alright."

And so Harry and Hagrid sat up a while talking about Hogwarts and the wizarding world. Hagrid explained why Harry was famous and about what classes will be like. They were so engrossed in conversation that they didn't even realize how late it was until the sun came up. 'Strange. I can't remember the last time I didn't get a full night's sleep, but I'm not tired at all.' Hagrid did appear tired, but he decided they should get going.

When they stepped outside, an owl swooped down and delivered Hagrid a newspaper. Hagrid gave the owl a little bronze coin and the owl took off. Looking around, Harry noticed that there was only one boat.

"Hagrid, how did you get here?"

"Hmm? Oh, I flew. But we will take this boat. Not really supposed to do magic now that I got yeh. Seems a shame to row though. Would yeh mind if I sped it up a bit?"

"Not at all. I like magic."

While they were speeding back to shore, Hagrid was reading the newspaper. Harry had learned from Vernon that people liked to be left alone while they did this. However, he couldn't help himself.

"Hagrid, how do they choose what house you'll be in?"

"At the opening feast, you try the Sorting Hat on and it tells you which house you belong in."

"How does it choose?"

"Well, there are lots o' factors. The brave and noble go to Gryffindor, the bookish types go to Ravenclaw, the Loyal and hardworking to Hufflepuff, and the cunning and rotten to Slytherin."

"Rotten? You mean that if you're a bad person you go there?"

"Well, no I s'pose not. But more dark wizards an' witches came from Slytherin than any other house." 'Well, it sounds like that's definitely not Hagrid's favorite house.'

They continued to travel to Diagon Alley, as Hagrid said it was called. People kept staring at Hagrid because of his size and because he'd point to perfectly ordinary things like parking meters and say, "look at the things these muggles come up with, eh?" Harry thought it was ridiculously amusing. Finally, they got to a small pub called the Leaky Cauldron.

Everyone here seemed to know Hagrid; Harry supposed he must be a regular. When the man behind the counter noticed Hagrid (which was almost immediatly considering his size) he asked, "the usual, Hagrid?"

"Nah, can' today Tom. On official Hogwarts business." he said, laying a hand on Harry's shoulder.

"Bless my soul. It's Harry Potter." He said this with such reverence, Harry thought he might as well be the Pope. Despite the low volume in which Tom made his proclamation, the entire bar suddenly stilled, and Harry was the center of attention.

"Umm, Hi."

After a few seconds of silence, there was a great scraping of chairs and everyone in the bar was shaking his hand. Somewhere in the mass confusion, a man with a twitch in his left eye stepped up. "I-I-It's a p-pleasure to meet you M-Mr. Pott-tter."

"Ah, Professor Quirelle, didn' see yeh there. Harry, this is Professor Quirelle. He's yer Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher this year." The way he said it made Harry think that Hagrid suspected that Quirelle wouldn't be the teacher next year. 'Well, he does look a little frail, though, next to Hagrid, anyone would.'

"Hello, Professor."

"Well, we gotta get goin'. Lots ter buy." And Hagrid proceeded to cut a path to the back door of the pub. When they were in a small courtyard, Hagrid just looked at Harry and smiled. "See, I told yeh yeh were famous."

"Well, it is still strange. I suppose I'll have to get used to it though, if I don't plan to never go out again, though." Hagrid just laughed.

Then Hagrid took out his umbrella and tapped a specific brick on the wall, and an arch way opened to a busy alley way. "Welcome to Diagon alley, Harry."

It was truly amazing. Every thing in the alley seemed to sparkle with an unseen energy. The further in he got, the more exited Harry became. He was trying to look at everything at once. When he hurt his neck turning it too fast, he decided that he should calm down. He decided to save this energy for later. He was liking this too much and didn't know why he wasn't constantly tired any more, but he didn't want to get tired again. Then he saw the wand shop, and without paying attention, his feet just started taking him there. Until Hagrid stopped him.

Chuckling, Hagrid said, "Yeah, yeh'll be needin' one. But we gotta go ter Gringots first; get yer money."

'Right, can't buy stuff without money.' He nodded.

When they got the big white building, Harry noticed the strange looking creature guarding the door. 'This must be a goblin. Bit intimidating.' Inscribed on the door was a poem. 'Even goblin poetry is intimidating.'

They walked up to one of the tellers that was not busy. The goblin looked down at them (those were some tall chairs) and sneered. "Can I help you?"

"Yes, we're here ter visit Mr. Harry Potter's vault, and ter get the, well, you know what in vault 713." At this he handed the goblin an envelope.

"Hmm, I see. And do you have Mr. Potter's key?"

"Oh, right. I got it here some where." Hagrid started digging through his pockets. He had several door mice in one pocket and a whole pile of dog treats in another. "Right here it is." He started putting the stuff back in his pockets. The goblin looked disgusted.

The goblin clapped his hands twice. "Griphook will take you to your vaults."

The new goblin lead them to what looked like an old mine cart. When they got in, they were told to keep all limbs inside the cart. Then it took off.

Harry was having the time of his life. He had never been on a roller coaster, but he imagined it was like this. At one time, he thought he saw a burst of fire down a tunnel to the right, but it went by too fast to tell for sure.

When they stopped, Griphook asked to see the key, and he opened the vault.

"Shit!" "Sorry Hagrid."

Hagrid just chuckled. "It's alright. I imagin my reaction would be the same."

But seriously, that's a lot of gold. 'This is nice. Well, lets get some and spend it.'

When they got back to the cart, Hagrid asked if the cart could go slower, which it either couldn't, or the goblin thought Hagrid's plight was funny. Harry was torn between pity and amusement. When they stopped, Hagrid was very green.

"Stand back." Then the goblin ran a finger down the door, and it dissolved. "If anyone but a Gringots goblin tried that, they'd be sucked in."

"How often do you check if someone's in there?"

"About once every ten years." 'Man that's a scary smile.'

When Harry looked in, all he saw was a grubby little package in a corner, but, for some reason he couldn't explain, he wanted closer to it. He felt hungry, and that package was an all you could eat buffet. His thoughts and feelings confused him, but right now, all that mattered was the package. Then Hagrid put it in his pocket.

"Best not ter tell anyone about this either, Harry."

"...Right" 'What was that.'

One cart ride latter, and they were stepping out into the alley. "Why don' we get yer robes first. While yer there, I can go get meself a pick-me-up at the pub." And in fact, he did look green still.

"ok"

Hagrid walked him to Madam Malkins, then went towards the Leaky Cauldron.

When Harry stepped in, he was immediately accosted by a middle aged woman. "Hogwarts dear? I have another one getting measured right now."

"Actually, I do need the uniform, but I also need a full wardrobe as well."

"Yes, I can see that. Well go on back and we'll get you measured. After we get your robes, you can look around for other clothes."

"Thank you."

She put him up on a little foot stool, and started taking his measurements. Looking over, Harry noticed the blonde boy looking at him.

"You starting this year too?"

The boy looked a little stuck up, but answered kindly enough anyway. "Yeah, my mom's in the apothecary and my dad's looking at wands. Where are your parents?"

"Dead."

"Oh, sorry." He didn't look it. "Well, they were our kind, weren't they?"

"They were a witch and wizard, if that's what you mean." Man, what a ponce.

"Yeah, I don't think they should let the other kind in. I mean they haven't been raised to be like us. By the way, I'm Malfoy, Draco Malfoy."

"Harry Potter."

It seemed that Madam Malkins had finished measuring him. "That's you done. You can go look at your other clothes now."

'Well, at least I don't have to stay here and sign autographs for the ponce.' "Are you really?" 'Spoke too soon. I'll just raise an eyebrow at him and keep going.'

When he had gotten all his clothes (and changed into some of them) he went outside and saw Hagrid there eating ice-cream. He had one for Harry too.

"Thank you."

"Nah, don' think on it."

They walked around getting all the stuff on the list. When they got to the books, Harry bought far more than what he needed. Magic interested him, and he wanted go be good at it.

"Blimey, Harry, Yeh got enough books?"

"Yeah, I want to be good at this magic stuff."

"Yeh're goin' ter Ravenclaw."

"Hmm, maybe."

"Well, yeh're goin' ter be needin' a bigger than normal trunk with all those books. Let's go get one."

They ended up getting the expansion set. It was a trunk with six key wholes. Each one opened a different compartment. One was for books. There were two rows of books and a lever in between them. If

you pushed the lever in one direction, the rows moved in that direction, bringing forth more books and covering up the ones that were there. Harry had no idea where it took the books, but at least he could get them back. Another lead into a room designed to be a potions lab, with a vanishing charm on the ceiling for fumes. There was one that was just a blank 20 x 20 room. The rest were just compartments. He had just enough money left to buy a wand.

"Do yeh really think yeh needed such a big trunk?"

"Not yet, but I might later, once I get wizard stuff to fill it up with."

Hagrid just chuckled.

When they left, Hagrid took him to the pet shop, and against Harry's arguments, bought him a snowy owl as a birthday present.

Harry was still expressing his gratitude when they got to Ollivander's. It was dusty, but every thing tingled with the energy that Harry had come to associate with magic. Hagrid dinged the bell, then sat on a chair, that surprised Harry by supporting Hagrid's weight.

"I thought I might be seeing you soon, Mr. Potter."

Harry jumped. From the sound of the chair cracking, so did Hagrid.

"Mr. Hagrid. Oak, 16 inches, rather bandy wasn't it?" 'Wow, that's a memory.'

"Yes, sir, it was."

"But then, I suppose they snapped it when you were expelled?" His creepy voice was suddenly stern. Weird.

"Er, yes, they did, yes," Hagrid said, shuffling his feet. "I've still got the pieces though."

"You don't use them though, do you?" Hagrid shook his head roughly. Harry noticed him gripping his umbrella, which he had seen Hagrid do magic with, rather tightly. "Well, good."

Then he turned his attention to Harry, or, more specifically, his scar. "And that's where...I'm sorry to say, I sold the wand that did that. Thirteen and a half inches. Yew. Powerful wand, very powerful. If I had known what it was going out into the world to do..." He shook his head. "Well, now Mr. Potter, lets get you measured up. Now which is your wand arm?" He took out a tape measure.

"Well, I'm right handed..."

"Hold out your arm. That's it." And he measured. Everything. "Every Ollivander's wand has a core of a Powerful magical substance, Mr. Potter. We use unicorn hair, phoenix tail feathers, and the heartstrings of dragons. No two Ollivander wands are the same, just as no two unicorns, dragons, or phoenixes are quite the same. And of course, you will never get such good results with another wizard's wand."

It was at this point that Harry noticed that the tape measure was measuring on its own. In between his nostrils no less. Mr. Ollivander was gathering wands and bringing them over to the counter. "That's enough." The tape measure fell to the floor lifeless.

Harry then started trying wands. More like uselessly waving sticks around. Even though he could feel the magic in each and every one of them, none of them reacted to his. The more wands he tried, the happier Ollivander seemed to get.

"Tricky customer, eh? Well, let's see about that." Then he stopped on one wand. "Hmmm. I wonder..." He handed the wand to Harry. "Holly and phoenix feather. Nice and supple."

This was what Harry had been waiting for. He could feel his magic course through his arm to the wand. When he lifted the wand and brought it down swiftly, a stream of shining bright white smoke seemed to pour out. The light it gave burnt everyone's eyes.

This seemed to make Ollivander think. "Curious, very curious," he said, and it wasn't until Harry asked what was curious that he said, "Mr. Potter, I remember every wand I've ever sold. Every single one.

The phoenix that gave the feather for your wand gave another feather, just one other. It is curious that you should be destined to this wand when its brother, why its brother gave you that scar." 'Hmm. That is indeed curious.' "Thirteen and a half inches. Yew. Curious how these things happen. It is the wand that chooses the wizard Mr. Potter. I think we can expect great things from you Mr. Potter. After all, He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named did great things. Terrible yes, but great."

Harry spent the rest of the summer reading. He read and reread his school books, until he was sure he would have no problems remembering the important details. Then he started on the extra books he got. One in particular got his attention. Mechanics of Magic by William Power was an incredibly understandable volume detailing how magic worked. It stated that every spell is a combination of magical strength and force of will. The words were a trigger to help weaker wizards and witches focus their will. The more powerful the wizard, the less he had to focus, but the more power each spell took. 'It seems best to be both focused and powerful then.' 'duh'

Harry tried not to use too much energy. He wasn't nearly as tired as he had been before the trip to Diagon Alley, and he didn't want to wear himself into that state. He suspected that in some way, magic helped keep him sustained. That explained why he felt better at the alley and with Hagrid than any time in the past year. However, none of the books mentioned any thing about wizards needing magic to feel energized.

Chapter 2

On September first, his family drove him to Kings Cross and left him there. When he looked for platform 9 3/4, he was not surprised to not find it. However, the barrier between platforms nine and ten practically shone with magic, much like the barrier into Diagon Alley. However, unlike Diagon Alley, the Magic also made the wall slightly transparent. Not enough to see the other side, just enough to let you know there was another side. Walking up to it, Harry tried to touch it. When his hand passed through, he walked right through. Taking only a moment to gaze at the red train, he helped himself to a compartment in the middle of the train. The one he chose had a girl with bushy hair that seemed to be slightly older, but probably in his year.

"Hi, I'm Harry. "

"Hello. My name is Hermione." 'She sounds like she's surprised I'm talking to her. Must not have had many friends in grade school.'

"Can I sit here?" asked Harry, taking the seat across from here.

"Oh, sure. I don't mind."

"So, what house do you think you'll be in?" 'Yeah, that sounds like a good conversation starter.'

"Well, I've been reading, and Gryffindor sounds like the best by far. I read that that was the one Professor Dumbledore was in. Though, I don't suppose that Ravenclaw would be too bad."

I sounded like she was going to keep going, but Harry cut her off. "So, you are muggleborn?"

She eyed him, as though trying to see if he had a problem with that. "Yeah, so?"

Harry smiled. "Cool. I was raised by muggles, myself. I'm kind of glad not to be the only one who has to read and ask questions to know what anyone is talking about."

She smiled brightly at him. "I know! That's exactly how I feel. I've already applied all my school books to memory, and I've read lots of background books on wizarding history. What books did you read?"

"Well, I learned the school books, too. I also read a bunch of other books on magical theory and application. I'm not too interested in history, myself, but I like the idea of making things happen."

"Yeah, I've tried a few spells, and they've all worked. How about you?"

"Well, I was told that we aren't supposed to do magic outside of school so I didn't try, but I think I could now." And with that he pulled out his wand and concentrated. He had been getting a bit warm, and so he cast a cooling charm on the compartment.

"Hey, now it's cold," she scowled. Harry just smiled and pulled a cloak out of his trunk. He gave it to her and she smiled.

"So, tell me something about yourself."

"Well, I'm Hermione Granger. I suppose I'm a bit of an over achiever. My parents are both dentists. Now you."

"Well, I'm Harry Potter. I-"

"Wait, you're Harry Potter!"

"Yeah. I was hoping you wouldn't have heard of me. I guess you read about me somewhere?"

"Yeah. You were in Modern Wizarding History and The Rise and Fall of the Dark Arts and Great Wizarding Events of the Twentieth Century."

"Was I really?"

"You mean you don't know? I would have found out everything if it was me."

"Well, like I said. I'm not interested in history. I know enough about my special history from Hagrid. He's the gamekeeper at Hogwarts. He came to bring me my letter and take me to Diagon Alley on my birthday. He had to deliver the letter because my aunt and uncle were trying to keep the letters from me. They had known all my life that I was a wizard, but they hid it from me, saying that my parents died in a car crash. That still pisses me off."

"Language. And why would they do that?" He thought it was amusing that she corrected him and switched to concerned so quickly.

"Well, my uncle has always hated anything that disrupts his idea of what is normal. Therefore, I, being the embodiment of magic, and thus abnormality, was completely unwelcome in his house. I think my aunt had a little of that as well, but also, she had been jealous of my mother (her sister) for being born 'special' and stealing her parents affection. She transferred that distaste onto me."

"Wow, that's terrible."

"Nah, it wasn't so bad the last year. I have been a bit under the weather for a year. Strangely, I got better just as I started getting the letters."

"What were you sick with."

"I'm not sure. I was just tired all the time. No energy. Tell me something. Does magic make you kind of hyper?"

"What, you mean do I get excited at the prospect?"

"No, I mean does being around magic give you energy?"

"Not that I've noticed."

"How did you feel after going to Diagon Alley."

"Well, it had been a long, emotional day. I was tired."

"Hmm." Harry supposed it was just him, then. Why does magic make him feel better?

"What?"

"Well, when I got back, I had more energy than I had had all year. And I hadn't slept for forty-eight hours. I think, somehow, that I can sustain myself with magic. I haven't read anything like it, but I believe that is what was keeping me sick. The complete absence of magic in my life."

"Maybe you should ask around at Hogwarts?"

Harry smiled at her. "I'd rather not. Most likely, everyone will be staring at me enough, with out adding the freaky magic eater into the factor."

That made her laugh. "Oh, it won't be that bad." Harry raised an eyebrow.

"Hey, why is there a frog in our compartment?"

"That's a toad. It must be someone's pet. We should keep it for them."

"Hagrid says toads are 'uncool' nowadays."

"But if the Great Boy-Who-Lived has one, everyone will want one." 'Oh, aren't you clever.'

"Well, in any case, I would not want to mar my brilliant good looks with warts," Harry said, trying his best to look like Malfoy from Madam Malkins.

Hermione was giggling openly now. She picked up the toad and held it for about ten seconds until a round boy knocked and came in looking like he had been crying. "Has either of you seen...Trevor!" Hermione handed him the toad, smiling kindly at the boy. "Oh, thank you. I'm Neville, by the way, Longbottom."

"Hermione Granger."

"Harry Potter." Harry winced.

Neville jumped and did a double take to his scar. "Oh, I'm sorry for just barging in here on you. I didn't mean to." He probably would have gone on jibbering apologies.

"Calm down. It's cool. Don't worry so much."

"Sorry." And he left.

"Told you it'd be bad." She just laughed at him.

They talked amiably for a while. When the trolley came around, they got some of everything. Neither had much of a sweet tooth, but both were insanely curious about the different kinds of candy.

A little while later, their door opened again, this time admitting Draco Malfoy. "The word is Harry Potter is in this compartment."

"Yes, we met already Draco."

"Wait, so you really are him. I thought you were just making that up."

"Why?"

"You didn't answer me when I asked you." He had a look like he expected everyone to answer when he speaks. 'Ponce.'

"Yeah...well, I am, in fact, Harry Potter. And this is Hermione Granger."

Hermione stood up. "Pleased to meet you."

Malfoy just raised an eyebrow to her. "I thought I told you that the only sort of wizard is a pureblood."

"Wow, you are a ponce, aren't you?" This only seemed to piss him off.

"You'll watch yourself."

"Why? You don't look like you could fight your way out of a paper bag, whether with magic or not. And your monkeys probably don't understand half of what we're saying." Harry was smirking as Malfoy's pink flush got a little darker. As Malfoy was struggling to draw his wand, Harry drew his own and cast the disarming charm. Malfoy's wand went one way and Malfoy went the other. Harry tossed the wand out the compartment and onto the pile of the other three boys. He then closed and locked the door.

"Thanks, but you didn't have to do that." Hermione seemed torn between being grateful and annoyed that he didn't let her defend herself.

"I know, but I've wanted to use that spell on him ever since I learnt it."

"You can't just go around hexing people," she scolded.

"Why?"

"How would you like it if they did it to you?"

"No one would dare hex the Great Harry Potter," Harry smirked at a disapproving Hermione. "Fine, I won't hex him, every time I see him. I will only do it if he sends one at me first."

"Well, alright. But no baiting him to make him try to hex you." Harry just smiled at her.

They talked peacefully until they got to Hogwarts. When they stepped off the train, Harry immediately heard Hagrid's voice yelling, "Firs' years, over here. All righ' there, Harry?" Harry wave.

As they were walking to the boats, Hermione leaned in and whispered, "That is a big man."

Harry chuckled. "Yeah, I think he must be part giant. I feel a lot of magic from him, and it feels different from any other wizard I've met."

They picked a boat with Neville and a red headed boy. He introduced himself as Ron Weasley, and as soon as he found out who Harry was, he fell out of the boat. Climbing back in, he asked if Harry remembered the attack.

"I remember a flash of green light and Voldemort laughing." When he said the name, both Ron and Neville fell out of the boat.

When they climbed back in, they said together, "You said the name!"

"Yeah, so?"

"Cricky, man. Aren't you scared?" asked Ron, slightly flabbergasted, slightly awed.

"Of what?" Harry knew that most of wizarding kind acted this way. He could barely get Hagrid to say the name once, and never after that. Harry thought it was stupid.

"Of You-Know-Who!"

"Are you asking if it scares me to say the name of a man who has not been seen in ten years, and is thought to be dead?"

"Well, yeah."

"No. I'm not."

At this, Hermione couldn't hold her laughs in any more. "Harry, quit teasing them. They were raised to be afraid of the name."

"Well, it's stupid."

By this time, everyone had gotten in a boat and Hagrid started them moving. As they turned a bend, they got their first sight of Hogwarts. As soon as it came into view, however, Harry got a sharp pain in his brain, that immediately spread to his whole body. It vanished as quickly as it came.

Hermione was the only one who noticed. She leaned over and asked if he was ok. "I'm fine. I think my body was just getting used to all the magic in the air." Ron and Neville were too engrossed in staring at Hogwarts to notice the conversation.

They docked and Hagrid left them with an incredibly stern looking woman. She lead them to a room and left them there, while she went to see if they others were ready. While all the students were talking about the sorting, Harry overheard Ron mention wrestling a troll. He burst out laughing.

"So what is it really?" Hermione asked, curiously.

"You just have to try on an old hat," Harry replied, trying to hold in the laughter. Hermione laughed too.

Finally, after an interview with some ghosts, they were led into the Great Hall. The ceiling was charmed to look like the outside sky, and everyone was in awe. The hat sang a funny little song, and the sorting began. Hermione, in accordance to her wishes, was put into Gryffindor. Surprisingly, so was Neville. Malfoy was put into Slytherin. 'Don't want to be in Slytherin.' Finally it was his turn.

Hmm. Difficult. Very Difficult. Very loyal. Plenty of courage, I see. An excellent mind, as well. And a literal thirst for power. Now that is interesting. But where to put you.

'Please not Slytherin.'

Not Slytherin, eh? You could be great you know, and Slytherin could help you on your way to greatness; no doubt about that. But no, you would be miserable sharing a dorm with that great ponce, I know. All right, better be

"GRYFFINDOR!"

Chuckling, Harry hurried over to sit with Hermione. The others were making a big deal about Harry. Especially a couple of twins that looked to be related to Ron, who was just sorted into Gryffindor.

"...Nitwit, blubber, oddment, tweak." And with that, the feast appeared. Harry wasn't hungry, but he ate anyway, because it looked so good. Hermione was talking with another Weasley about classes and Harry was disappointed to hear that classes would be going so slowly. Eventually, the food disappeared and Dumbledore gave another speech. Then they followed Percy up to the dorms. When they got there, the other boys immediately fell asleep. Harry tried, but felt like he would need to be knocked unconscious to fall asleep. Eventually, he gave up and went down stairs to read.

Chapter 3

"Harry?" asked Hermione sleepily.

"Yes, Hermione?"

"Why are you up so early?"

"I never went to sleep. I'm still not used to all the energy in the air."

"Oh." She then pulled out one of her own books, and sat next to him. By now he had read several of his extra books and was working through the rest of what he called the machine book. His opinion was that it was his most helpful one.

The power of one's will is the most important determining factor in most magiks. With a strong enough will, most spells can be done silently, or even without the aid of a wand. There are in fact many magical arts that by tradition do not use a wand. Among these are Invisibility, Legilimency, and Occlumency.

Legilimency and Occlumency, the mind magiks, are the arts of mind invasion and mind defense respectively. A Legilimencer can, with enough force of will, delve into his opponent's mind to recover information. The truly talented can do this undetected, and the masters of the art can even control the will of his opponents; possession. Occlumency is the art of defending one's mind from such penetration. If one is truly talented, one can fool the Legilimencer into thinking he succeeded by providing false memories.

"Harry, it's time for breakfast."

Harry jumped, he had been reading all night without interruption and forgot she was here. "Right. We get our schedules at breakfast, right?"

"Yeah, let's hurry." Harry smiled at her eagerness. Together they made their way to the Great Hall. They made it there after only a few wrong turns. Harry just picked at his breakfast, eating only to have something to do, until the schedules got passed out.

The next few weeks passed easily. Harry introduced Hermione to Hagrid, and they hit it off nicely. Harry also found that at Hogwarts, he only needed about six hours of sleep per week. While that left him a bit bored at night, it also made sure that all his homework was done and gave plenty of time to read.

He had been looking for more books on Occlumency and Legilimency, but had found none. The machine book didn't go into any further detail, and none of the rest of his books mentioned the mind magiks. He was very interested in them. He knew he wanted to protect his mind against intrusion, but he also wanted to learn Legilimency as well. 'So I'm a hypocrite. So what?' He took to looking through the library, but he suspected that the books he wanted were in the restricted section.

Hermione kept trying to talk to the other students, particularly Ron Weasley. Her problem was that, while Harry didn't mind her talkative, know-it-all nature, Ron did. Several times, he and Hermione ended up at each other's throat.

In October, they had flying lessons. Hermione was very nervous (she liked walking, thank you very much) and Harry thought that had a lot to do with her inability to even get the broom into her hand. When at last everyone had their brooms, Neville took off prematurely. He would have crashed, but Harry flew up to him, and grabbed the handle of his broom. Steering Neville to the ground, Harry tried to block out the applause from the students. Malfoy looked jealous of the attention being given to Harry, but chose not to start a confrontation.

A few days before Halloween, Harry and Hermione were visiting Hagrid, when Harry saw an article in Hagrid's newspaper. It mentioned that the vault Hagrid emptied on Harry's birthday was broken into that same day.

"Hagrid, what was that you took out of vault 713 on my birthday," Harry asked innocently.

Hagrid started choking on his tea. When he cleared, he said, "Harry, yeh know I can' tell you tha'."

"Yeah, but you know that I can't help but be curious now that it was broken into."

"Well, I guess I can' blame yeh for tha'. But I still can' tell you."

"Don't you trust me?" asked Harry, with his best puppy dog face. He nudged Hermione and she pouted as well.

Laughing, Hagrid said, "O'course I do, but this ain't my secret ter tell. It's between Albus Dumbledore and Nicholas Flamel."

"The alchemist? ...Oh! Now I see. Shit, no wonder someone was trying to steal it."

Hermione looked like she was thinking, then it came to her. "The Philosopher's stone?"

Hagrid looked uncomfortable. "Shhh! I shouldn' have told yeh about Flamel. Just forget about the Stone, please."

"Calm down, Hagrid. We're not about to steal it. I imagine that's why we're not allowed in that third floor corridor?"

"Yeah, tha's right. It's being guarded by a Cerberus named Fluffy."

Harry asked, "What's a Cerberus?"

"A Cerberus was the guardian of Hades. A giant three headed dog," Hermione recited.

"Fluffy?"

"Well, he had ter have a name, didn't he?"

"Sure. Well, thanks for the tea Hagrid. Don't worry, we won't mention this to anyone. We should go."

"All righ'. Yeh have a happy Halloween you two."

Lessons thus far had been fun, if a little easy for Harry and Hermione. Apparently, Hogwarts teaches to the lowest common denominator. Harry could understand that, even if it did bug him. He would spend class just sitting there, looking interested, while actually going over whatever he read the night before. Whenever the teacher asked him to demonstrate the spell, he did, but mostly, he just zoned out.

Today, though, he was thinking over what he read in his favorite book, three nights ago. Spells are little more than a burst of magic that has been twisted and manipulated by the caster's will to perform a desired effect. The words are only important as a trigger for one's mind. It helps the caster keep in mind the desired effect, as well as gives the caster a specific signal to release the magic. Harry had tried several times to try to manipulate his magic like this. He would will a desired effect (like changing pumpkin juice into Koolaid; he just didn't like these strange wizarding customs) and then he would try to make his magic bid his will. He could feel the magic within himself forming a spell, but he couldn't get the magic to leave his body to do its work.

Hermione though, seemed to have a need to see everyone around her reflect her outstanding intelligence. Either that, or she was rubbing it in that she was better than them. Either way, she got into many an argument with her classmates for bringing them up to speed. One such case was her favorite pupil, Ron. Hermione was trying to help Ron with his levitation spell, and Harry could tell he didn't appreciate it.

Later, at the feast, Harry was asking the other Gryffindors where they had last seen Hermione. She wasn't at the feast. Eventually, Parvati told him that Hermione was in the girls' bathroom crying. He was just getting up to go get her when Professor Quirelle burst through the doors. Ever since the welcoming feast, Harry has been uneasy around Quirelle. He was still the stuttering idiot he was at the Leaky Cauldron, but his magic was a lot stronger. And it felt like it was decaying.

The school was in chaos at the good professor's announcement of a troll. Dumbledore, however, was able to restore order with a few

firecrackers from his wand. He told the students to go to their common rooms while the teachers go fight the troll.

Harry, immediately took off to the girls' bathroom. He didn't think anyone noticed him, but he also didn't care. Hermione was no match for a troll. When he got there, he immediately burst through the door and noticed a very sad Hermione. She didn't see him at first, but when she did, she latched onto him. She went off completely, telling everything that Ron said that upset her.

"Shh, it's alright. Hermione, I know you are upset, but we've gotta go."

"Why? Wh-what's wrong?" she asked, still sniffing, though she was clearing up seeing how urgent Harry was being.

"There's a troll in the school." She didn't answer, but was staring at something behind him. 'Great, it's right behind me.'

Turning around, Harry was only slightly relieved to see that it was not in fact right behind him, but still coming through the door. He shoved Hermione behind him and tried to see a way out of this.

"Harry, do something!"

"I don't know any spells that will take a troll!" 'What does she want me to do? Stick my wand up its nose? Wait, I don't know a spell that will work; maybe I can make one.' Concentrating as hard as possible, he pointed his wand and tried to force his magic to blast the thing in the head. Try as hard as he might, the spell would not leave his wand. That's when he remembered that the words sometimes help to release the magic. Thinking of what he wanted the spell to do, there was only one word that he could think to apply.

"KAAPOW!" With that, a yellow light with a slight spearhead burst from his wand toward the troll. It connected with the troll's forehead with a blast like gunshot. A similar effect too. When the troll fell backwards, Harry and Hermione were left looking at a splattering of red and grey on the wall behind it.

After a brief pause, Harry shook himself. "Hermione, let's go. I don't want to be found here."

Hermione, however, just looked at Harry like he slapped her. "Kaapow!" 'Figures that is what she is upset about. That spell wasn't in any book.'

"Let's discuss it later. We need to le-"

Right then, Ron burst into the bathroom. "Hermione, there's a troll in...the...school." He skidded to a stop at the sight of the troll. Hermione looked like she was torn between two emotions. Harry couldn't understand why; his only emotion now was anger at Ron for what he said. 'No wonder she's got no friends. Bah! I'm her friend, aren't I? What an idiot!'

Harry by now realized that they weren't going to leave the bathroom before the teachers got there. He was sure they heard them, and if they didn't, they would just follow the smell to the troll. He was thinking what to tell the teachers when they got there. He could only think of one idea before they arrived. Pointing at Ron, Harry proclaimed, "He did it."

The teachers were in shock. How the hell had a group of first years beaten a troll so severely? Ron was in shock too, but for different reasons. It was easy to see when the teachers came out of shock. Dumbledore had a look in his eye that clearly said that he thought Harry's somewhat childish proclamation was funny. 'Well, it is kind of funny.' Snape started sputtering that Harry should be expelled. 'Probably just upset I didn't die. What's his problem with me anyway? And is that blood on his leg?' And McGonagale looked even more confused.

"How did this happen?" She sat down on one of the closed toilets.

"He did it." There was so much seriousness in his statement, that the teachers looked at Ron for conformation. Naturally, Ron replied with the only thing a child can reply with to that statement.

"Did not."

"Did too!"

"Did not!"

"That is enough, both of you. Miss Granger, how did this happen?"
'Damn, Hermione won't lie to McGonnagle.'

"I went looking for the troll, because I thought I could handle it. I've read all about them." 'Well, there goes that theory. But Ron is not getting away with it.'

"That's bull. Tell them why you were really in here Hermione."

After a bit of coaxing, she told them that she was in here because she was upset because Ron said she had no friends. McGonnagle looked furious, but still thought the troll was a bigger issue.

"And after that?"

"Well, I was in here, when Harry burst in saying that we had to go to the common room. We were just about to leave when the troll came in." Harry was really nervous now. "We were both really scared. I could barely think straight, and Harry was standing in front of me, protecting me. Then he pointed his wand at the troll and said...something...and a yellow spell came out of his wand and blasted a hole in the troll's head."

Professor Dumbledore didn't seem surprised at all, though he was the only one. "And tell me, miss Granger, what spell was it that he used?"

"I don't know" She looked really confused.

"Well, what was the incantation?" Hermione mumbled something that the others couldn't hear. Harry was trying to sneak around the teachers to the door. "I'm sorry, my dear, what was that?" He spared a glance at Harry to let him know not to leave. 'Damn'

Hermione looked like she was forcing herself to say it. "Kaapow." At this, Professor Dumbledore did look surprised.

"Mr. Potter?" He was clearly saying that it was time for Harry to come clean.

"I don't know how I did it. I just wanted to hit the troll and knock it out or something. I didn't know any spells like that, so I just tried to imagine throwing something at the troll really hard and I yelled 'Kaapow'. I didn't expect it to work."

At this, Dumbledore smiled at Harry, much like a grandfather. "I believe, Mr. Potter, that you have just invented a spell, if accidentally. Next time, I would advise not to use so much power. You must be tired."

Harry looked at the floor. If anyone was a legilimencer, it was this guy. "A little, but I think the adrenaline still has me on a bit of a high."

Chuckling, Dumbledore responded, "Yes I suppose so. Now, I think it is time you all were to go to bed."

Finally, they left the bathroom, stepping over Quirelle, who had fainted when he first saw the troll brains. Ron started asking about the troll almost as soon as they left the bathroom. He was trying to walk next to Hermione, but Harry stepped in between them. 'How dare he? It was his fault she was there in the first place!' They answered his questions (Hermione was a little more kindly than Harry) and Ron went ahead to the common room with a short "Sorry Hermione" when they asked for a moment to talk. They ducked into an unused classroom.

"How did you do that!" 'Well, I'm surprised she waited this long.'

"I have been reading on magical theory. The book says that magic can be manipulated using just a person's will. It says that the spells and incantations are not needed if you have a strong enough will power to force the magic to obey your desire."

"Then, why don't they just teach magic that way?" Hermione seemed upset that someone would say that her books were wrong.

"Because their way is easier. Magic can be forced like I did in the bathroom, but it is easier to let the magic flow through the channels that known spells have created. And also, most witches and wizards don't have a powerful enough will to force it or to do so without the incantation as a trigger.

"Now enough about theory. Why does it look like you have forgiven that useless moron?" Strangely or not, Hermione seemed to understand that Harry was talking about Ron.

"Well, he was trying to come warn me, and he did say that he was sorry." Harry got the feeling that Hermione just wanted a reason to forgive Ron. Looking at how badly Ron's words hurt her, even though they were obviously untrue, made Harry realize that Hermione liked Ron. He decided to let it go, but was still unhappy about it. Ron was a dumbass.

Chapter 4

Starting in November, people started getting excited over quidditch. Harry had read over the rules, and it sounded like an interesting enough game, but he thought that a little too much emphasis was put on the seeker. They basically won or loss the game.

After the incident at the flying lessons, people had been bugging Harry to try out for the team, but, considering that by custom first years don't play, coupled with his general unwillingness to attend the practices, Harry declined. Ron, who had taken to hanging out with them much more often (to Harry's intense displeasure), was especially perplexed at Harry's unenthusiasm for the game. They were standing out on the grounds arguing about it when Professor Snape limped his way over to them.

"What's that in your hand, Mr. Potter?"

"Mechanics of Magic, by Power."

Snape snatched it out of his hand. "Library books are not to be taken out of the school. Five points from Gryffindor." He then stalked off, before Harry could say anything.

"That wasn't a bleeding library book! And he just made that rule up!" Harry was seething. Professor Snape had been entirely unfair to him since day one. He had asked Harry ridiculously difficult questions in class that day, right after mocking his celebrity status, trying to embarrass him. Harry would not have been able to answer if he had not learned the book before school. He even took points for being a know-it-all. He's the one who asked!

"Harry, watch your language." Hermione seemed to be trying to be stern and sympathetic at the same time.

"Calm down, mate. That's just Snape for you." Harry just glared at him. 'I am not your mate.'

"Well, I'm getting my book back." And with that he stormed off, making his way to the teachers' lounge. When he got there, the door was partially open. Hearing voices, Harry listened.

"Stupid thing. How are you supposed to watch all three heads at once?" 'That's professor Snape. And he was getting onto me for breaking rules, when he is sneaking around forbidden corridors!' Harry decided it was time to enter the conversation.

"Actually, sir, I don't believe you are supposed to be able to watch all three heads at once. That would kind of defeat the purpose. So, why were you trying to sneak down a trap door in a forbidden section of the school?" Harry was aware that he could get into a lot of trouble for this, but didn't really care at this point.

"POTTER!"

"No need to shout, sir. I'm right here." He smirks.

"GET OUT!" Snape was growing redder by the second.

"Actually, sir, I need my book back."

"No! I confiscated it for your violation of the rules!"

"Sir, that is not a library book. It is from my own, personal collection."

"Nonsense. Why would a first year need a book like this?" He seemed to be forgetting what Harry had just heard.

"Because I thought it looked interesting. I have already read it several times, but I would like it back none the less." Harry was starting to get annoyed.

"Well, I will be keeping it until the end of the semester as a punishment for eavesdropping on my conversation." He was just trying to piss Harry off now. 'Well, congratulations, professor. You succeeded.'

"We can take this to the Headmaster, if you prefer." Harry hoped Snape let his pride trap himself. He did.

"Fine. Follow me, Mr. Potter." Harry smirked.

As they made their way through the halls, Harry noticed that Snape seemed to be mumbling something about arrogance and 'Snivillus.' 'Heh, I bet that's what they called him in school. Fitting.' They finally arrived at a gargoyle. Snape muttered a password too quietly for Harry to hear, and it moved aside, revealing an escalator.

When they got to the top, they were asked to come in before they even knocked. "Ah, Severus. And Mr. Potter as well! What can I do for you."

"Mr. Potter has been in violation of the school rules. When I enacted a punishment, he requested a meeting with you to decide if the punishment was fair." Snape seemed to be trying to present a reasonable argument to the headmaster.

"Oh? And what was his crime?"

"He had a library book out side the school, and he was spying on my private conversation with Mr. Filch in the teachers' lounge. I took house points and confiscated the book."

"That sounds reasonable. Mr. Potter, what is your take on this?" Snape looked upset. He obviously didn't think the Headmaster would question Harry.

"I am innocent of both charges," Harry claimed, formally. "That was a book from my personal collection, and I only heard what Professor Snape was saying when I went in to ask for my book back. I believe the professor is just upset because I heard him say that he attempted to get past the Cerberus that guards the forbidden chamber on the third floor."

At this, Professor Dumbledore looked sufficiently shocked. He looked at Snape for a while before seeming to decide what to say. "Well, I think you should give Mr. Potter his book back, Severus." Snape

seemed to have taken one of the lemon drops from the bowl on the Headmaster's desk, if his sour look was anything to go by, but he complied. "Now, if you'll excuse me, Mr. Potter, I need to speak to Professor Snape alone."

'Yeah, I bet you do.' "And the five points he took, sir?" 'Yeah, I'm rubbing it in, so what?'

"Of course. Five points to Gryffindor." 'How does he stay so calm?'

"Good bye, Headmaster. Professor." And with that, he left. Laughing.

The next day, before breakfast, Harry had told Hermione everything that had happened. She went immediately to Snape's defense, saying that no professor would be trying to steal the stone. Harry still didn't know if he believed that Snape tried to take it or not.

"Look, either way, we'll know today at breakfast."

"How?"

"Well, if Snape is at breakfast, he obviously had a good excuse." He still couldn't help but smile everytime he thought of the trouble he put Snape through.

"Well, that's true. I think you are enjoying yourself too much."

"Well, it's funny." And, truly, it was.

They got to the Great Hall and Harry immediatly felt the glare of his favorite professor. He just smirked at the greaseball. There was a lot of commotion in the hall today. It was the first quidditch game of the season. Gryffindor versus Slytherin. Everyone was surrounding the team, trying to get them hyped, or what not. Harry just sat next to Hermione, occationally eating a bite or two.

Later, Harry was walking to the game with Hermione, being followed by Ron, when Hagrid joined them.

"Er, Ron, why don't yeh run up ahead. I need ter talk ter Harry n' Hermione a bit." Ron was a bit miffed, but he complied. "Now, what happened with Snape that's got him so worked up with yeh?"

Snickering, Harry replied, "Well, he got into trouble because I overheard him saying that he was trying to get past fluffy on Halloween."

"Wha'? No, he wouldn'. He's helping to protect it; he wouldn' try to steal it." Hagrid seemed to have alternate reasons for defending Snape, but Harry didn't press.

"Well, he hasn't been fired, so I assume he had a good reason, but he definately tried to get past Fluffy. He's got the bite marks to prove it."

"Fluffy wouldn' hurt a fly!"

"Sure he would; he's a guard dog. It's his job."

"Oh, yeah, well...He's still a good dog." Hagrid seemed to be a bit defensive about his Cerberus. 'I suppose he's had quite a few people tell him that giant killer dogs don't make good pets.'

"I don't doubt it."

They then made their way back to the stands. They were just in time to see the game start. Gryffindor had a new seeker this year, but Harry hadn't heard her name. Who ever she was, she was easy to spot. She had pink hair. As they watch the game, Harry began to feel worse, and worse. Eventually, Harry got to the point that he couldn't stand anymore. His head was pounding, and it felt like someone kept hammering a wedge into his scar.

"Harry, are you alright?" asked a worried Hermione. Almost as soon as she said that, his head practically split open. He grunted in pain and bent double, clutching his head. Looking around, Hermione saw that Quirelle was looking right at Harry, and that he seemed to be enjoying what he saw. "Just a second, Harry. I'll be right back."

Harry, who had seen what she was looking at, grabbed her hand. "Wait, don't go near him."

"Why? He's hurting you."

Harry decided it was time to leave. He got Hagrid's attention. "Hagrid, I'm not feeling well. We're just going to go."

Hagrid looked down at him. "Well, why don' yeh come over ter me hut, and I'll fix yeh a cup o' tea."

"That would be fine."

As soon as they got out of Quirelle's line of sight, the pain receded. Harry got back to Hagrid's hut feeling much better.

"Well, I think I know who it is that is trying to steal the stone." Hagrid dropped the cup he had just picked up at Harry's statement.

"What do yeh mean someone's tryin' ter steal it?"

"Well, we had thought it was Snape, what with him trying to sneak past Fluffy and all, but now I think he was just trying to head off Quirelle."

"What? No, Quirelle wouldn't try ter steal it. He's one of the one's protectin' the stone."

"That would just make it easier for him." Hermione seemed much more willing to believe this on Quirelle than Snape. Maybe because she just saw Quirelle trying to hurt Harry.

"Well, what makes you think he is trying to get it?" Hagrid seemed determined not to believe that someone would try to steal it.

"Well, we saw him in Diagon Alley, the very day that it was broken into. He's the one who told everyone about the troll on Halloween (I'm betting he let it in as a distraction), and he just attacked my mind. The thing is, though, that I think he has some connection to Voldemort." This seemed to shock both Hermione and Hagrid.

"What makes you think that Harry?" Hermione seemed really scared.

"Well, the pain I was getting in my head just now was coming from my scar. I wouldn't think that anyone but the guy that put it there would be able to affect it."

"Harry, I think yeh are over reactin'. It was probably jest a head ache. An' all that other stuff was just coincidence." Harry and Hermione shared a dark look.

They spent the rest of the day hanging out with Hagrid. Harry didn't really want to leave; he was having fun not being with Ron. Eventually, they all went to dinner. Ron wanted to know why they left the game early. Hermione had been asking Harry to include Ron in with what they knew about the stone, but Harry was sure Ron would just screw everything up.

Chapter 5

Harry had long since finished all of his own books. He looked through the library, but found nothing that really interested him. What he really wanted was a book on occlumency and legilimency. He took to leaving the common room at night. He would always dress totally in black when he did this, and he would stick to the shadows the whole time. A couple times he just missed Filch. One time he had to actually run from him. Luckily, Filch didn't see his face.

During these nighttime excursions, he would wander the restricted section of the library. He never took a book down (he could feel a faint magic on them, probably to prevent the abduction of the restricted materials), but he browsed the titles, looking for something to catch his eye.

On the third night of December, he found one that looked promising. The title was *Your Magical Mind*, and it also was by Power. He touched the spine of the book carefully, ready to sprint any second, but nothing happened. So, he picked it up. Now he could hear the books making a faint whispering sound. He was sure an alarm would go off if he opened the book. He thought the alarm would also go off if the book left the restricted section. 'Great.'

Finally, he made a plan. He would cast a silencing charm (over the whole section, just to be safe) and he would spell the book open from across the library, just behind the door. If the alarm went off, he would wait for Filch to come running in, then would sneak out behind him.

The silencing charm worked. He went to one of the private rooms of the library and spent the next four hours making a copy of the book. He couldn't do it magically because of the copyright spells, so he did it by hand.

He got back to the common room just in time to see Hermione come down the girls' stair case.

Hermione was happy that he finally found the book he was looking for, but she scolded him for half an hour for sneaking out, and another

half an hour for finding a way around the rules. She rounded off by insisting to read the book when he was done.

That day was the first snow day. No one wanted to stay inside when the snow was outside. As soon as classes let out, everyone was on the grounds. All of Gryffindor house was involved in a snow ball fight. Harry had never been able to play in the snow at Privet Drive, either because he didn't have the energy or because his relatives were pricks, so now he was really getting into it.

He, Hermione, Fred, and George were crouched behind a bunker that they made out of snow, lobbing snow balls over, when they saw Quirelle pass by the Whomping Willow. George charmed a snowball and threw it as hard as he could towards the bunker where some second years were hiding. It went around them and started bouncing off of Quirelle's turban. Hermione was freaking out, afraid that Voldemort's servant would seek retribution, but Harry just laughed right along side Fred and George.

Hermione would be leaving during Christmas break to visit her parents. Harry was dismayed to find out that only one other person from their year in Gryffindor would be staying: Ron. Hermione kept insisting that Harry use this opportunity to warm up to the red head. Harry thought the opportunity would better be used to warm up to the other Weasleys, specifically, the twins. They were funny.

He did, in fact, spend most of his time with the older Gryffindors. Fred and George showed him a few secret passage ways that he hadn't found during his nighttime visits to the library, and they let him in on a few of the joke candies they had been inventing for the joke shop they were planning to open in the future.

Ron, however, seemed to genuinely want to be friends with Harry. He would start talking when Harry was trying to read, and he would follow Harry when ever he left the common room. Harry had long since learned to put up with his presence without feeling the need to hex the poor boy, but he couldn't bring himself to be nice. He really couldn't stand stupid people. They reminded him of his 'family'.

However, Ron did play a mean game of chess. Harry lost to him several times before he started to get a handle on the game. He could see that the game required an intelligence of some sort to succeed; Ron wasn't completely useless after all, just mostly.

Harry was sure to stay awake the entire week precluding Christmas so that he would be able to sleep the night before (had to make sure Santa came, right?). Christmas morning dawned bright and early. Harry woke up and was about to go down stairs when he noticed a pile of packages sitting on his trunk at the foot of his bed. He noticed the one that was from his 'family' immediately (the smallest, lightest one). He threw it away. Hagrid gave him a flute that Harry was sure was hand carved. Hermione gave him a book on transfiguration (it had obvious signs of already having been read) and a box of sugar free candy. Ron's family, for some reason, gave him a sweater and some chocolate frogs. Harry supposed that Ron had written home and told them how often he hung out with Harry (without Harry's permission).

Then there was just one package left. Harry didn't have a clue who it could be from. When he opened it, a silvery, liquidy cloak flowed over his hands to the floor. 'Holy hell! Is that an invisibility cloak?' He tried it on. 'It is! Awesome!' Then, he heard Ron stirring. He stuck his cloak into the second compartment of his trunk (one of the regular sized compartments).

Ron yawned. "Morning Harry." Then, suddenly, he was wide awake. "Presents!"

"Hey, Ron, why did your mother send me a sweater?"

"She did? I guess because I told her that we have been spending a lot of time together. You should try it on, they're really warm."

"I will when I go outside later. It's too warm in the common room already."

At this point, Fred and George barged into the room. George noticed Harry's sweater. "Hey, look, Harry's got a sweater too. Why aren't you two wearing yours?"

Harry could tell that the Weasleys were going to be offended if Harry didn't try it on right now. If it was just Ron, then it would be fine, but it wasn't. He cast a cooling charm on the room and put on his sweater.

"Jeez Harry! Why do you always like it so cold?"

"I just don't like to be hot. Ron, you wouldn't be cold if you would just put on your sweater." Ha, turn it around on them.

"She always makes mine maroon. She knows I don't like maroon."
'You are a maroon.'

Just then, the last Weasley in the castle joined them. "Why are you making all this noise? Keep it down."

Identical smirks adorned Fred and George. "Percy got a sweater too! Try it on, Perce." Fred and George forced the sweater over Percy's head, pinning his arms to his sides. "You're not sitting with the prefects today either. Christmas is a time for family." And with that, Percy was drug from the room.

The rest of Christmas Day passed nicely enough. Harry, having not had a decent Christmas since his first, greatly enjoyed the feast and surrounding merriment. He even tried to get along with Ron, though he didn't think Ron ever noticed his hostility before. When it started getting late, Harry started studying his book on the mind magics again. He had been practicing with occlumency ever since he copied the book, and it wasn't what he thought it would be. He had expected occlumency to be like having walls built around your mind. The book says occlumency is the art of directive remembering. To keep a legilimencer from recovering a specific memory, one must simply (or not so simply) refuse to remember it. The legilimencer must bring that memory to the front of the victim's mind to have access to it. If the occlumense can keep it from coming forth, it is as though it does not exist. The trick is to keep oneself from thinking about the truth when lying to a legilimencer.

When Harry noticed that Ron had gone to bed, he quietly went up stairs to collect his new cloak. When he got it, a note fell out. Your

father left this in my possession before he died. It is time it was returned to you. Use it wisely. It had no signature and was written in a loopy handwriting that Harry didn't recognize. 'Still, I do have permission to use it at least. And it was my father's.' That decided, he put it on, and left the tower.

He spent the night wandering around the castle. He still had a hard time finding his way sometimes, so he was taking this opportunity to learn more about it. It was almost three o'clock when he stumbled across something strange. In an unused classroom was a full sized mirror. It was wonderfully decorated and gave off a magnificent energy. In fact, the whole room seemed full of magic, yet Harry was sure the mirror wasn't the source for most of it. Nothing else seemed to be in the room, and Harry couldn't figure out where the excess energy was coming from, so he concentrated on the mirror. Carved into the top of the mirror were words, though they didn't seem to be any language he could understand. Erised stra ehru oyt ube cafru oyt on wohsi. 'Hmm.'

Stepping in front of the mirror, he almost screamed. The mirror reflected not only himself (which shouldn't have happened, as he was wearing an invisibility cloak), but a whole host of other people too. Hermione was right next to him and the two of them seemed to be talking to Hagrid and a couple of other people that Harry didn't recognize but knew immediately who they were. His parents.

'That is a nice image.' Harry could tell that it was just that though. While there was, in fact, a lot of excess energy in the room, none of it was the energy Hagrid had put off that Harry had come to realize was Giant energy. It seemed that the mirror was showing his deepest wish. 'Oooh, I get it.' Smiling Harry murmured, "I show not your face, but your heart's desire."

From behind him, Harry heard someone clapping. Wheeling around, he saw Dumbledore standing near the door. 'Well, that explains all the magic I felt.' He took off the cloak and faced the Headmaster.

"Very good, Harry. It seems that you, like so many before you, have discovered the delights of the Mirror of Erised."

'Hmm, it seems I might come away from this without a detention from being out past curfew.' "Yes sir. You wouldn't happen to have a camera would you? I have no pictures of my parents, and one with them standing next to me seems too good an opportunity to miss."

"No, I'm sorry, Harry, but cameras do not work on the mirror anyway. It would just reflect you to the camera." 'oh' "I notice you figured out the secret of the mirror more quickly than anyone I have ever encountered. How is that?"

"Well, my parents are dead, sir. There's no way they could be standing next to me. And I'm sure I would know if Hagrid was actually in this room. It was obvious that all that was just in the mirror, and the image it presents is the one that appeals to me more than any other that I can think of."

"Very good Harry. It is a very nice mirror, but I am sorry to say that after tonight, it will be moved to a new location. Please, don't go looking for it."

"Yes sir."

"Now, why don't you put that marvelous cloak on and go back to bed?" 'He doesn't seem at all surprised that I, a person raised by muggles, have an invisibility cloak.' "Sir, you wouldn't happen to know who gave me this cloak, would you?"

"As a matter of fact, your father left that cloak with me. I know you will make good use of it. I think your father valued its usefulness every time he needed a snack from the kitchens." 'I was right. The Headmaster is crazy.' Harry smiled.

Chapter 6

Harry spent the rest of the Holidays exploring the castle by day and reading the restricted book by night. He would not call himself a master occlumense, but he thought it might be enough considering that no one expected him to know any occlumency at all.

Hermione returned the day before class started. She was completely fascinated by the cloak, upset that he used it to break rules, and curious with his story about the mirror and Dumbledore's odd behavior. Harry tried to explain that it was okay for him to use the cloak to sneak out at night, seeing as how Dumbledore told him to use it well, but she still seemed skeptical. She was also glad that Harry didn't glare at Ron quite as much anymore, though it wasn't enough to get her to stop pushing them together.

As promised, Harry let Hermione read the book he had copied from the library. She finished it in under a week. After that, they decided to learn occlumency and legilimency together. One would attempt to break into the other's mind, then they would switch. They were both doing quite well.

Ron had been acting oddly. He would sneak off for hours at a time and then pretend he hadn't. He was also growing more and more hostile towards Professor Snape and more and more sympathetic to Professor Quirrell. Hermione eventually decided that enough was enough.

"Please, Harry. I know you don't like him very much, but I do. We need to know why he is acting like this. For all we know, Voldemort has been manipulating him to do some...evil bidding or something."

"Well, if you are so worried, why don't you try out your legilimency skill on him?"

"I wouldn't do that! That is a serious invasion of privacy!"

“Fine, I’ll do it for you.” Harry thought it was funny that she didn’t argue against that. ‘Leave the dirty work to me then, huh? Hm, doesn’t bother me.’

When they tracked down Ron, he was on the third floor, right outside the door to the forbidden corridor. When asked what he was doing there, he replied, “Oh, well...I was on my way to the common room when I got tired, so I sat down.”

Harry didn’t need legilimency to know that was a lie. Hermione just said, “Ron, we need to talk to you in private. Can you come with us?” He didn’t seem to want to leave, but couldn’t think of a good reason to stay.

When they got to an empty class room, Harry locked the door. Questioning this, Ron was answered with a muttered, “Legilimense.’

Shifting through Ron’s most recent memories, Harry discovered that Ron had done enough detective work to find out that something important was hidden in the third floor corridor and that someone was after it. He suspected Snape. Digging a little further, Harry found a memory of a conversation between Snape and Quirrell that Ron had overheard. He had overheard just enough to think that Snape needed Quirrell’s help with whatever protection he provided.

When Harry was done, Ron, needless to say, was very confused over what had just transpired, and had a bit of a headache. “What was that, Harry?”

“Hmm? Oh, yeah. I needed to know why you were acting like you support Quirrell. You know more than I expected, but Snape is not the one trying to steal it.”

“Why didn’t you just ask what I know?”

“That way was faster, and I wanted to practice my legilimency.” At Ron’s confused look, Hermione explained what legilimency was. Harry then explained to Hermione what all he had seen.

Harry and Hermione had a brief private debate on whether or not to tell Ron what they know. Harry eventually gave in. He was against including Ron, and anything that causes trouble for Snape was okay in his book, but he agreed that it was more important to thwart Quirrell. They explained that it was the Philosopher's Stone that was down there. Then they explained what the Philosopher's Stone was ('Bleeding moron'). They also told him that Quirrell was the true culprit and that he was working for Voldemort.

When they were through, Ron seemed hurt. "Why didn't you guys tell me about this before?"

Hermione didn't want him upset at her. "We promised Hagrid that we wouldn't when he accidentally let it slip to us."

"Besides, you didn't tell us either," Harry added.

"Well, yeah, that's true. Sorry. So, what are we going to do about it? I've been trying to guard the room in my free time, but I don't know how much I could do against You-Know-Who." 'I know how much you could do: nothing.'

"We aren't going to do anything. The only thing we can do is to wait and see what happens. Quirrell isn't going to try to take it with Dumbledore still at the school, and I don't think he knows how to get past the Cerberus yet, either."

Harry, Hermione, and Ron visited Hagrid the next day. He seemed reluctant to let them in when he noticed Ron, but complied just the same.

It was very hot in the cabin. Probably a side-effect of having all the curtains drawn and a fire going full blast. Hagrid was nervous, and Harry noticed that his thoughts centered on the fire. When Harry looked closer, he noticed an egg in the fire.

"Hagrid, what are you doing with a dragon egg?" Hagrid just sighed.

“Two seconds and yeh already foun’ meh out, eh Harry? Yeah, it’s a dragon egg. Norwegian Ridgeback. I won him in a card game down in the pub.” Harry got a glimpse of a man with his face obscured by a hood.

Hermione got worried. “Hagrid, dragons are illegal to keep as pets. You can’t tame them!”

“Sure yeh can, Hermione. Yeh jest have ter know how.”

“You live in a wooden house!” But Hagrid had stopped listening. He was making cooing noises to the fire.

“Hagrid,” Harry asked, “what did the guy you got it from look like?”

“Well, I dunno. Kept his hood up. Guy seemed a bit glad ter be rid of ‘im ter be honest.” ‘Uh, oh.’

“Don’t you think that’s a bit odd?”

“Well, no. Might have been a dealer, mightn’t he?” ‘Well, I suppose. But I think a dealer would want some money in exchange.’

“Did the two of you talk at all?”

“Well, yeah. ‘E wanted ter know what kinds of animals I’ve looked after, ter know if I could take care of a dragon, see. I told ‘em, after Fluffy, a dragon’d be no problem.’

“Did he seem interested at all in Fluffy?” asked Hermione.

“Well, o’course he was interested in Fluffy. How many Cerberus’s do yeh meet, even if yer in the trade? But I says ter him, I says, ‘The trick with any animal is ter know how ter calm it. Take Fluffy, fer example. Yeh jest play him a bit o’ music and he goes right ter sleep...damn. I shouldn’ have told yeh that.’”

‘Damn is right. Best to just pretend every thing is alright for now.’
“Well, anyway, you know you can’t keep the dragon, don’t you?”

“I know, but I can’t think of anything else to do.”

It was then that Ron decided to be useful. “My brother works on a dragon reserve in Romania. We could send it to him.” Hagrid did not seem to appreciate Ron’s helpfulness.

After the dragon hatched, Ron sent a note to Charley (Ron’s brother) via owl. They were helping Hagrid take care of the dragon, but it was not easy. Dragons were mean.

Draco (who had been spying on Harry for some time now, trying to get him into trouble) saw the dragon through the window one evening. He seemed to enjoy having something to hold over them, so he didn’t tattle right away.

One evening, Ron came back from taking care of the dragon with Hagrid (Harry had decided that if Ron was to hang out with them, he would fill the role of lacky, and thus, would do the grunt work). He had been bitten, and Hermione, who had been reading up on Norwegian Ridgebacks, told him to go to the infirmary as they were poisonous. The nurse made him stay overnight.

Draco “visited” Ron to gloat some more, and Ron accidentally let him borrow the book that had Charley’s reply in it. Draco knew they were sneaking the dragon to the astronomy tower that night.

Harry and Hermione were thus glad that the invisibility cloak covered both them and the box. On the way up, they passed Professor McGonagall, who was dragging Draco by the ear as he tried to convince her that Harry Potter had a dragon. They made it the rest of the way up without incident, chuckling.

On the way back to the common room, Harry abruptly stopped and pulled Hermione into the shadows. She asked, “What’s wrong, Harry?”

“We forgot the cloak.”

“Oh, god! You’re right! And I think I hear foot steps.” She was right, of course. As Filch came around the corner, Harry tried to make the two of them invisible. He concentrated on not being noticed and forced his magic to comply. He remembered that, traditionally, invisibility did not use a wand, so he didn’t.

Filch and Mrs. Norris just passed by them, with out looking at them. Looking down, Harry was surprised to see that they were not invisible. He supposed Filch could have just missed them because they were in the shadows, but Mrs. Norris should have noticed them. ‘Noticed...of course! I somehow managed a notice-me-not charm on us with wandless magic. Awesome!’

When they were out of earshot, Harry and Hermione got the rest of the way to the common room. Harry then explained what he did. Hermione was both impressed and grateful. She didn’t like the idea of getting caught. When she went to bed, Harry went back to the tower and retrieved his cloak. The next day, Harry learned that Draco had a detention along with Neville, who had heard Draco say that Harry had a dragon and had tried to warn him.

Chapter 7

Ron spent the next few weeks being nagged by Hermione to study. She would occasionally nag Harry as well, but he was having none of it. He had all night every night to study. He would spend the day time learning the layout of the castle (while he was allowed to), joking around with Fred, George, and the other Gryffindors, or talking with Hagrid.

It was during one of these sessions with Hagrid that Harry learned of the trouble with the unicorns. Hagrid had been the one that Draco and Neville had their detentions with. They went into the forest to look for a unicorn that had been injured, and they split up. Draco and Neville found it, but it was still being fed on by a hooded figure. They were saved from what Harry strongly suspected was Voldemort by a centaur. The centaur escorted them back to Hagrid and told Hagrid that the forests are not safe for students at the moment.

Finally, the exams were upon them. Harry was certain that he aced them, but Hermione seemed to worry needlessly. Several times Harry had to point out that Hermione was the smartest person in their year. Hermione was also fretting about Voldemort. After Harry had told her about the unicorns Hagrid had mentioned, Hermione became very anxious. She told him about all the terrible things that can happen when someone drinks unicorn blood. She was sure it was Voldemort; no one else would wish that upon themselves.

When they were finally through with their last exam (History of Magic), Ron managed to convince Hermione that it was time to relax. They were relaxing under a tree when they saw Professor Dumbledore walk out of Hogwarts, outside the gate, and apparate away.

Hermione immediately worked herself up. "Oh, no! He's gone! He's left and now Quirrell's going to steal the stone and give it to Voldemort and he's going to come back to life and be immortal—"

"Hermione! I doubt that Professor Dumbledore left it unprotected. He is well aware that someone is after the stone, I'm sure that he told

the other professors of the dangers and that they will be on high alert.”

“Yeah, maybe you’re right. Can we go tell them anyway, just to be sure?”

“Sure.” They started walking through the halls towards the teachers’ lounge. About half way there, they met with Professor McGonagall.

“Professor! We need to talk to you.”

“Well, what is it, Miss Granger?”

“We need to talk in private, Professor,” said Harry.

“Very well. Follow me.” And she led the way to her office. When they got there, she sat behind the desk and motioned for them to sit as well. “Would any of you care for a biscuit?” They all accepted (Hermione just for manners’ sake). “Now, what was so important?”

Harry decided to take it. “When we saw Professor Dumbledore leave, Hermione became worried for the safety of the Philosopher’s stone.” Professor McGonagall dropped her biscuit.

“What? How do you...?” She attempted to pull herself together. “Well, I don’t know how you found out about the stone, but I can assure you that it is perfectly safe. It is too well protected. Now, if you lot will excuse me, I have exams to grade.” And with that, she shoed them out of the room.

“Well, that didn’t go well. I suppose we’ll just have to do this ourselves.”

“What do you mean?” asked Ron.

“I mean, that tonight, I am going down that trap door, and I’m going to steal that stone before Quirrell can.”

“Oh, but you can’t! You’ll be expelled for sure!” exclaimed Hermione.

“Well, there are more important things happening right now. I’m not asking you to come with me, but I’m definitely going. Besides, I want to prove to McGonagall how ineffective her almighty protections are.”

Hermione sighed. “Trust you to save the world out of spite. Fine, I’ll go with you.”

“Good. Ron, I’m going to need you to stand outside the door while we go in. If you see a professor, stop them and tell them that we probably need their backup against Quirrell.”

“What? No way! I’m going in with you!”

“No, you are keeping lookout. We are going to need reinforcements and we need you to get them for us.”

Ron looked at Hermione, but she knew that Harry wouldn’t bend on this. Sighing, Ron conceded. “Fine. But what if it’s Filch that comes by?”

“He won’t catch you. You’ll be invisible.”

“How will I be invisible?”

“You’ll be under my invisibility cloak.”

“You have an invisibility cloak! Awesome!”

They spent the next few hours just hanging in the common room. When finally the common room cleared of students, Harry retrieved his cloak and his flute. In the common room, Harry noticed that Neville was sitting in one of the chairs still. Sneaking up behind him, Harry hit him with a stunner at the lowest power he could manage. It was enough to put the already sleepy Neville to sleep.

The trio snuck down to the third floor where Peeves was busy loosening the rug. Attempting an impression of the Bloody Baron,

Harry managed to scare him off. Harry pulled out the flute, and he and Hermione stepped into the corridor.

The dog growled, but Harry's playing quickly lulled it to sleep. In the corner, there lay a harp. They opened the trap door, and Harry signaled to Hermione that he was going first. He handed her the flute and jumped down. He landed on a plant.

"It's ok! You can jump!" Then, Harry noticed that the plant was coiling around his legs. 'Devil's Snare. Just great. Well, I'll conjure a fire when Hermione gets down here. She needs a soft landing.' Just after Hermione landed, Harry conjured a fire and made it make a walkway to the door. When Hermione asked what the fire was for, he told her what kind of plant it was.

In the next room, there was a bunch of keys flying around the ceiling. Looking, Harry saw one that was obviously for the door on the other side. It was the only one big enough for a key whole that size. There were brooms sitting against a wall.

"You've got to be joking." It took Harry and Hermione ten minutes to corner the key (Hermione is not a very good flyer).

When, at last, they made it into the next chamber, they were faced with a life-sized chess set. Hermione started going on about how they should have brought Ron, but Harry just levitated himself over the pieces. When he got to the other side, he levitated Hermione as well ("Harry! Put me down this instant!")

In the next room, they were met with an even bigger and smellier troll than the one they had killed on Halloween. Luckily, it was unconscious.

In the next room, there was a table with potions on it. Harry and Hermione worked out the riddle. The one that would allow them onward only had enough in it for one swallow. Harry made Hermione take the one that would let her go back and told her to go stay with Ron. When she had left, he grabbed the two with wine and pocketed them. Then he went on ahead.

When he got to the next room, he found Quirrell staring into the Mirror of Erised. "Hello, Professor."

"Yes, I wondered if I would be seeing you here, Potter. Funny, you don't seem surprised to see me. How did you come to realize that poor st-stuttering Professor Q-Quirrell was the one trying to steal the Philosopher's Stone?"

"Why, deductive reasoning. I met you in Diagon Alley the very day that Gringots was broken into. Then you were the one that let the troll in on Halloween. And all those conversations you have been having with Professor Snape without taking any effort to find out if you're being spied on. At first, I thought it might be Snape, but it was quickly obvious that it wasn't."

"Snape, yes he does seem the type, doesn't he? Why did you decide it couldn't be him?"

"Well, my only real reason to suspect him was that he seems to hate me, and he tried to get past the Cerberus on Halloween. I informed the headmaster of that, and Snape wasn't fired, so I figured it wasn't him."

"Yes, logic is wonderfully helpful. And incidently, yes, Snape does hate you. He and your father had something of a rivalry in school. Now, be quiet while I examine this wonderful mirror." Quirrell snapped his fingers and ropes appeared and tied Harry up. He concentrated and managed to get his own wandless magic to cut the ropes enough that he could get free.

"I see the stone. I'm presenting it to my master, but where is it?" He continued to mutter to himself. "I don't understand! Help me master!"

"Use the boy!"

"You, Potter, come here...how did you get out of those bindings?" Harry just shrugged while Quirrell pushed him in front the mirror. "Now what do you see?"

Harry saw himself. At first it seemed to be just a reflection, but then the mirror Harry winked and took something out of his pocket. It had to be the Philosopher's Stone. When he put it back into his pocket, Harry felt a lump rise in his own pocket. He could feel the phenomenal power source fill the room with magic, so much, that if he hadn't known that it was in his pocket, he would not have been able to pinpoint it. Realizing that Quirrell was still waiting for an answer, Harry told him what he usually saw in the mirror.

Quirrell cursed. "Get out of the way."

Harry did. He was about halfway out of the room when the high, cold voice of Voldemort shouted, "He lies!" 'Damn it. I let my guard drop. Oh, well.'

"Potter, come back here. Tell the truth. What did you see?"

"Let me speak to him, face to face."

"But master, you are not yet strong enough."

"I have strength enough, for this." Quirrell unwrapped his turban and turned on the spot. Sticking out of the back of Quirrell's head was another face, this one with red eyes with slits for pupils and a snake like nose. The face of Lord Voldemort. 'Eew'

"See what I have become? Mere shadow and vapors. I only have form when I can share another's body. But there have always been those that have been willing to let me into their hearts and minds. Unicorn blood has strengthened me these past weeks and once I have the Elixir of Life, I will be able to create a body of my own. Now, why don't you give me that stone in your pocket?"

"No, I don't think I will."

"Don't be a fool, boy. Don't let your preconceived notions of good and evil ruin this chance for you. There is no good and evil, only power, and those too weak to seek it."

“If that is indeed the case, then only someone incredibly weak would give up something like this.”

“You are smart, boy. Smart enough to know when to save your own skin. Give it to me or you will meet the same end as your parents. They died begging for mercy.”

Harry raised an eyebrow. “Now I don’t believe that.”

“Touching...I always value bravery. Yes, boy, your parents were brave. I killed your father first and he fought courageously. But your mother needn’t have died. She was trying to protect you. Now give me the stone unless you want her to have died in vain.”

“No.”

“Seize him!” At once, Quirrell lunged at him. Quirrell’s hand latched onto Harry wrist. Harry was struggling as hard as he could (he even landed a punch to Quirrell’s jaw) and to his surprise, Quirrell let go. He was staring at his hand and it was blistering before his eyes. Voldemort was still yelling Seize him! over and over, so Quirrell lunged again, pinning Harry to a wall with both hands choking the breath out of him. Harry could feel his scar searing with pain, so he put more effort into protecting his mind. Then, Quirrell stumbled off of him, howling with agony, his hands raw as though they were in a fire.

“Master! I cannot hold him. My hands!”

“Then kill him, fool, and be done!” As Quirrell started to draw his wand, Harry grabbed him around the throat and held onto his face, all the while trying his best to keep the pain in his scar to a minimum.

Finally, Harry could see a shadow soar out of Quirrell from the back of his head, and Quirrell collapsed into a pile of ash.

Gasping, Harry sat until he could get his bearings. Then, he reached into his pocket and took out the Philosopher’s Stone. As soon as he got a good look at it, his brain was invaded with an intense pain. It

wasn't coming from his scar, but from some place in the back of his mind. It was similar to the pain he felt when he first saw Hogwarts, but exponentially stronger. Then the stone began to glow, and, as he watched, it sank into the palm of his hand as though it were water. After a few moments of nothing, his whole body began to glow with a reddish gold light and he collapsed.

Chapter 8

Waking up, Harry found that the whole world had become blurry during his sleep. Waking up a little more, Harry realized that he wasn't wearing glasses. Someone handed said spectacles to him. When he realized that the headmaster was in the infirmary with him, Harry asked, "What happened?"

"That is exactly what I was going to ask you, Mr. Potter."

Then everything came back to Harry. He immediately recalled the story to the headmaster. Dumbledore took a moment to think it over before he replied, "Mr. Potter, you seem to have absorbed the Philosopher's Stone into your magical core. This is indeed an interesting turn of events..." Dumbledore seemed to lose himself in his thoughts.

"Professor, does this mean that I'm immortal now?"

"Oh, no, Mr. Potter. You won't retain any of the stone's properties. You simply broke the stone into its basic magical power and added that power to your own core. As of right now, you are at the same level as myself in terms of power, and as you age, that level will increase dramatically. Chances are, you will live to be at least twice as old as me before you die. What I want to know is how you managed to absorb it in the first place." At this, Harry looked up and met the twinkling eyes of the headmaster. He could feel the light probe on his thoughts, and allowed nothing but confusion to surface his mind.

"I don't know, professor. I didn't mean to do it, it just sucked into my hand...Oh, crap! Doesn't this mean that your friend, Flamel, will die?"

Dumbledore chuckled. "So, you know about Nicholas. You did do the thing properly didn't you? Don't worry, Mr. Potter. Nicholas and I had already decided to destroy the stone anyway. After all, to the well organized mine, death is but the next great adventure. Now, I've got something for you. When Madam Pomfrey informed me of your inflated core, I dug around in my belongings until I came across this."

He held up an arm band with rune markers on it. "This is a magical suppressor. I used to use it in my youth when I found the pressures of power to be too much. If you ever feel the need, you can use it to hide your power. It will force most of your magic to remain locked in your core, rather than allow it all to flow through your veins all at once. I suggest you wear it whenever you feel that you might be feeling a powerful emotion while outside of school. The ministry is lenient on accidental magic, but they would still inquire, just to make sure that it was, in fact, an accident. Probably best to avoid the situation all together."

'Hmm. That could be useful.' "Thank you, Headmaster. I probably will be using it all summer. But I have a question about something Voldemort said to me."

"Just the one question? Well, fire away."

"He said that he would not have killed my mother had she just given me up to him. Why was he more interested in killing a half-blood baby than a muggleborn witch?"

"Ah, Harry. I'm sorry to say that I cannot answer that. I know you will hate to hear it, but when you are ready, you will know."

"Do you mean that I will pick up the information myself, or that you will tell me when I'm older?"

"The latter, I'm afraid." 'Damn, I'm not going to change his mind.'

"Um, professor?" This was something he had been wondering ever since then end of the fight with Quirrell.

"Yes, Harry?"

"Should I be upset that I killed Quirrell?"

"Ah. Well, the loss of life is always regrettable, but when the situation makes it inevitable, there is very little we can do about it."

You should not be happy that you took a life, but I wouldn't beat yourself up, either. He would have died when Voldemort decided to leave that body, anyway."

"Okay."

"Yes, well, I should be going. I think you should take this opportunity to appreciate the tokens from your friends and admirers on your bedside cabinet. I believe your friends Fred and George Weasley were the ones responsible for trying to send you a toilet seat, no doubt they thought it would amuse you, but it was confiscated by Madam Pomfrey. She didn't think it was hygienic."

And with that, the headmaster left Harry to his candy.

Later, Hermione and Ron showed up. Harry told them what happened with Quirrell. He would wait until he could tell Hermione privately that he absorbed the stone. In the mean time, he was getting out of the infirmary.

"Ron, bring me my cloak."

"Why? You cold for once?"

"No, not that cloak; my special cloak."

Hermione interrupted them. "Why do you need it Harry? You know you aren't supposed to leave before Madam Pomfrey says so."

"That is exactly why I need it. She isn't going to let be go until after the feast."

"Well, then she must have a good reason. I'm sorry, Harry, but you need to stay here." Harry just smiled at her.

"Fine, no cloak." And he started to concentrate on not being seen. He had a lot more magic to coerce into making himself invisible, and he put a good chunk into it. He assumed it worked when they both gasped.

“Harry, mate! How did you do that without the cloak? Hey, since you obviously don’t need it, can I have your invisibility cloak?”

“No, it was my father’s.” Harry then grabbed both of their robes and pulled them into the hallway. “Now I’m not going to become visible until I get to the common room. See ya there.” And he left, after sniggering at Hermione’s disapproving expression at his disregard for what she thought he needed.

When he got to the common room, he went up to his dorm room and looked in his trunk’s first compartment. His cloak was laying across everything. He took it out and folded it up. He then put it back into the second compartment like he had it before. This way only someone with his key could get it.

When he got back to the common room, Hermione was waiting for him. “I can’t believe you. You need rest after an ordeal like that. You’ve got to be magically exhausted.”

“Actually, no, I’m not. I need to talk to you about that anyway.”

“What? Why?” Harry took her out of the common room and to an empty classroom. When he got there, he explained how he absorbed the stone into his core and what all Dumbledore said about it. “You mean you stole the stone for yourself!”

“What? No! I didn’t mean to absorb it, it just kind of happened. I don’t even know how I did it.”

“Oh. And Dumbledore wasn’t upset that you’ve been keeping your ‘freaky magic eater’ thing from him?” Harry had to laugh at her remembering his terminology.

“Well, he still doesn’t know that I was. I told him that I had no idea what happed, and his legilimency proved it to him.”

“Harry...” said Hermione, exasperated. Then Harry went on to tell her everything else Dumbledore said to him.

“Yeah, he’s the one that carried you back from the corridor. When I got back to Ron, we started to Professor McGonagall’s office. We hadn’t gone ten feet when Professor Dumbledore showed up. Somehow, he saw us through the cloak. He already seemed to know everything. He just asked, ‘Harry’s gone after him, hasn’t he?’ I think he meant for you to go, and if he did, well, that’s just terrible. You could have been killed!”

Once again stopping her rant before she really got started, Harry interrupted, “No, it’s not that bad. I was obviously able to handle things, and I think Dumbledore knew that. Hmm, maybe I should have asked him why my touch seemed to mean death for him...”

Later, Harry decided to visit Hagrid. When Hagrid saw who was at the door, he burst into tears. “‘S all my ruddy fault! I told the evil git how ter get past Fluffy! I told him! It was the on’y thing he didn’ know and I told him! Yeh could have died! And all fer a dragon egg. I’ll never drink again! I should be chucked out and made ter live as a muggle!”

“Woah, calm down Hagrid! He would have figured out a way to get past anyway, and I’m sure Voldemort’s way would involve hurting Fluffy. At least that didn’t happen right?”

Sniffing, Hagrid replied, “Yeh’ve got a point, there. And what are yeh doin’ outside the infirmary? I went ter visit yeh a few hours ago, and they said yeh flew the coop.”

“Heh, you didn’t expect me to just sit in bed for the rest of the semester, did you?”

Hagrid chuckled. “I probably shouldn’ have. I’ve got yeh sommat here. Dumbledore gave me the day off yesterday so’s I could fix it up for yeh. ‘Course he should have fired me instead...” Hagrid handed him a leather bound photo album filled with pictures of his parents. “Sent owls off ter all yer parents’ old friends askin’ fer pictures. Knew you didn’ have any. Do yeh like it?”

Harry smiled. “I love it.”

That evening was the feast. Gryffindor won the house cup for the first time in seven years (mostly thanks to Harry and Hermione). At the end of the feast, Dumbledore awarded Harry, Hermione, and Ron (even though he didn't do anything) plaques for special services to the school. Over all, it was a very joyous occasion.

Harry was not happy to be going back to his 'family's' house, but he knew that it would only be for the summer. He could live with it.

Chapter 9

It had been a week since Harry had gotten back from school. His uncle had put a lock on Hedwig's cage so that he couldn't send letters to all his freaky little friends. Harry waited until his family went on one of their outings that they never included him in, and then he made a call to Hermione. She asked him why he hadn't replied to her letter, and he explained that he hadn't gotten it. They talked for a while, but Harry had to go incase his family got back.

At the end of the month, Harry still had not gotten any letters. He knew Hermione had sent at least one. It was his birthday, and he was saddened to not get anything.

That night, his uncle was having a client over to discuss a deal. Harry was to stay in his room, making no noise, and pretending not to exist. 'I always stay in my room and make no noise. What do they think I will do?' However, when he got up to his room, there was a creature sitting on his bed. It took a little while to connect the creature with the description of a house elf that he had read.

"Can I help you?" That was the wrong thing to say. The elf started bawling and exclaiming how kind and wonderful Harry Potter was. Harry was doing everything he could to get the little thing to shut up.

"Listen, you have to be quiet. My aunt and uncle will be very upset if they hear anything from up here. Now what are you here for?"

"Dobby comes to warn you sir. Yous must not go back to Hogwarts."

"What? Why?"

"Terrible things are planned for Hogwarts. Harry Potter would be in great danger if he went back." Harry smirked.

"I am okay with danger, Dobby. I had a good deal of it last semester."

"Dobby heard, sir. Dobby hears tell that Harry Potter faced the He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named a second time, sir, and escaped again!"

"No, he escaped. I was winning."

"But sir cannot face this danger! It is more powerful by far than Harry Potter." Harry realized that the creature could sense his power level. Harry took off the arm band he was wearing. As soon as it was off, an aura of grey, silver, black, and white filled the room, before settling. Dobby's eyes were as big as saucers. "Oh, sir! Dobby is sorry! Dobby did not realize that sir was hiding his true power! But still, Dobby must warn! Danger comes to Hogwarts that has not been seen for fifty years. Harry Potter must be cautious!" He snapped his fingers, and disappeared.

Harry put his arm band back on, and looked up.

In the door way, was Dudley.

Two nights later, Harry was laying on his bed reading and recalling what happened. His uncle had been furious that Harry had invited one of his freaky creatures to his nice normal house. He had yelled and screamed and locked Harry in his room. Harry was now fed through a cat-flap, and only let to leave to use the bathroom. Harry didn't mind, he didn't really need much to eat, now that he was living off of magic. 'I suppose that I'm not tired because of the Philosopher's stone. Plenty of energy now.' The only thing that he didn't like about the new situation was that Hedwig couldn't get through the bars on the window to get outside. Harry had picked the lock on her cage, but the bars were still too narrow for her. He decided to use magic. 'Surely they would not expel me for my first offense. I'll even try to do it wandlessly so that I can say it was an accident.'

Harry put his full concentration into vanishing the bars, and put enough magic into it that he was sure it should work. It did. Ten minutes later, he received a warning from the ministry to not do any more magic.

He went back to his reading. He had just finished third year charms, and was about to start third year transfiguration. He hadn't gotten four pages in before it mentioned animagi. 'Now that is something I will have to learn. But I will have to wait until I get to school. It is sure to be in the restricted section of the library.'

Just as he decided this, a bright light filled his room from the window. Shielding his eyes, Harry realized that it came from headlights. From a car. Parked right outside his window. His second story window. "What the hell?" Then Ron stuck his head in the window.

"Hey, mate. Why didn't you answer any of my letters?"

"I didn't get any mail at all this summer." At this, there was a loud crack and Dobby reappeared.

"Dobby is very sorry, master Harry Potter, sir! Dobby forgot to mention before that he had stopped all Harry Potter's mail so that he would not think he had friends at Hogwarts and would not want to return! Dobby is a bad elf! Please forgive poor Dobby!" He said all this so fast that Harry was still trying to work out what he said when he dropped a pile of letters and disappeared, apparently to avoid being punished.

The three Weasleys (Ron, Fred, and George) were, needless to say, curious. Harry just loaded up his stuff in the boot, and explained it on the way to the Burrow, as the Weasley home was called.

When they got there, they found an angry Mrs. Weasley standing in the doorway. She yelled for about five minutes before she pulled a complete one-eighty and started coddling Harry. She fussed several times that he was far thin, and that he seemed to be growing like a weed from how short his pants were for him. That confused him. He knew he was at least two inches shorter last month. 'I guess maybe I'm growing to have room for the power the stone gave me.' Without thinking, he reached out and made his clothes grow with wandless magic. 'Oh, crap. I'm going to be expelled. They won't let me go just after they gave me a warning.'

"Harry, dear? Did you just make your pants legs grow?"

"I think I did. Man, now they are going to expel me."

"No, they won't dear. The ministry has no idea that it was you, and not me that did that transfiguration. But you shouldn't use magic

outside of school. It's against the law, and you have not got the proper training to bare a responsibility like that.

"Yes, ma'am." 'YES! I can practice here, and they can't do a damn thing about it!'

A while later, they were eating breakfast (Harry was just putting it in his mouth and vanishing it) when Ron's little sister showed up. She took one look at Harry and ran back to her room. Harry asked the twins if there was something on his face, and they acted like there was, of course. Ron decided to ignore the attempts at humor coming from Harry, Fred, and George and just explain that his sister had a crush on the Boy-Who-Lived. 'Well, that makes sense, I guess. You're not really famous unless you have a couple of excitable fan-girls.

Right then, Weasley Senior showed up. After he greeted Harry in the usual way (Harry Potter? Are you really? Wow, nice to meet you!), he started badgering Harry to explain everything about the muggle world. He was interrupted, thankfully, by the arrival of the Hogwarts letters.

Later, after a surprisingly fun game of Who Can Throw the Gnome the Farthest, they were on their way to Diagon Alley. After a visit to Gringots, where they met with Hermione, Harry was rather looking forward to getting some more books on the mind magics, and seeing if they had any on animagi, when saw the line for the book shop. Apparently, Gilderoy Lockheart (the person who wrote most of the books on the book list) was signing copies for readers. At first, Harry was intrigued at the prospect, but upon noticing that the line consisted of middle-aged witches and the occasional reluctant husband, Harry decided it would not be very fun. He collected all the books that he needed and wanted, and headed to the counter. Lockheart noticed his scar.

He jumped up and shouted, "It can't be Harry Potter!" Harry pretended to be looking around for himself like everyone else. Lockheart wasn't buying it though. He reached out and pulled Harry to him while posing for the camera. Harry, thoroughly pissed, forced his magic to make Lockheart feel as though he had been kicked in the shin. He placed a Notice-Me charm on Lockheart, and a Notice-

Me-Not on himself. Then, he allowed the cashier to notice him, paid for his books, and left. The Weasleys and Hermione met with him in the lobby, and were about to go when Draco showed up.

"I bet you loved that, eh Potter? Can't even go into a book shop without making the front page."

"Not nearly as much as I am going to love this Draco," said Harry, who was noticeably drawing his wand. Mrs. Weasley's scolding was interrupted by what sounded like an adult Draco. Mr. Malfoy walked through the door, and Harry felt magic that was surprisingly similar to the magic he felt from Quirrell last year, only much weaker.

"Now, now, Draco. Play nice." Then he noticed Mr. Weasley. "Ah, Arthur how are things at the ministry? All those raids? I hope they are paying you extra." He picked up one of Ginny's new used books. "Clearly, though, they are not. Tell me what is the use of disgracing the name of wizard if they don't even pay you well for it?"

"We have a very different idea of what disgraces the name of wizard, Lucius." Harry could tell that Mr. Weasley was barely holding himself back.

"Obviously." He glanced at the Grangers. "Consorting with muggles. And I thought you could sink no lower." Mr. Weasley lost it. He started beating the crap out of Mr. Malfoy. Harry, Fred, and George were cheering him on, when Hagrid, who had heard the commotion from outside, split them up. Mr. Malfoy left, with all his pureblood poise, but Harry noticed that the distorted magic that came in with him remained. He couldn't pinpoint it, but it followed them back to the burrow where Harry lost it in the spontaneous, cheerful magic of the Weasleys.

Chapter 10

Harry spent the rest of the summer practicing and reading. He was almost through with all of the third year material (History took a very long time, considering he would start thinking of other things while he was reading, and not retain anything), and was spending considerable time reading everything he had bought on animagi. It was a seriously complex piece of magic and would probably take a couple of years to master.

He had been corresponding with Hermione, telling her everything that had happened with Dobby, and what he had felt from Malfoy Senior at the book shop. He almost wished he hadn't though when she started worrying in all her letters.

The Weasleys, however, had other plans than allowing Harry to spend the summer by himself learning. He was invited to a Quidditch game almost every day. After they saw just how good he was on a broom, they would flip a coin to decide who should get him on their team.

He was really looking forward to returning to Hogwarts, but also dreaded it. Lockheart had, apparently, announced that he would be the Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher this year. Harry was sure he would end up putting the git into the hospital.

Finally, September first arrived. The Weasleys were not organized in the slightest, and the train was actually starting to move when Harry jumped onboard. Immediately, Harry went to look for Hermione. When he found her compartment, he cast a strong Notice-Me-Not on it while trying to make it specifically for Ron. He figured he succeeded when Ron passed right by, but his sister, Ginny, entered and sat quietly in the corner, blushing and sending glances at Harry every now and then. Hermione thought that was incredibly funny. Harry acted like he didn't notice.

It was then that Harry noticed that there was another girl in the compartment. She had dirty blond hair and big, blueish-grey eyes. He probably wouldn't have noticed her (she was sitting on the other side

of Hermione from him and he couldn't see her), but she took this opportunity to state the obvious. "You're Harry Potter."

Harry put on a confused face and looked down at himself. "What do you know? I am. I'm afraid, though, I don't know who you are."

Surprisingly, it was Ginny that answered. "That's Luna Lovegood. She lives on the other side of the village from us." And she blushed and looked out the window.

"Ah, hello Luna. Are you going to be a first year, too?" asked Harry. He thought the girl was a little odd, but odd usually translates into interesting. Interesting is good.

"Yes. I am going to be in Ravenclaw." She stated it as though it were fact.

"Is that right? I thought I might be going to Ravenclaw at first, though I really had no idea which one I wanted. The hat considered putting me in Slytherin, but Draco Malfoy had already been put there, so I refused."

The three of them talked amongst themselves for a few hours, with occasional input from a meek Ginny. Hermione didn't seem to like Luna very much. It probably had a lot to do with Luna's firm conviction in the truth of everything printed in her father's magazine, The Quibbler. Harry decided that he didn't want to set her straight, even though she informed him that the reason he survived the Killing Curse as a baby was because he was already dead and just exists as a really solid ghost that apparently ages. He rather liked that theory.

Just then, Draco and his goons barged into the compartment. "Why if it isn't Harry Potty. I hear you got in trouble for using magic over the summer."

"Harry Potty? What are you, four?" Draco's smirk fell instantly into an ugly frown. Still he forced himself to calm down as he replied.

"So, plan on killing this year's Defense professor?"

"Well, I don't plan on it, but considering the professor, I may be tempted." At this, Hermione gasped and glared at Harry.

Draco laughed. "Uh-oh. Looks like you upset the mudblood." At hearing the foul slur on Hermione, Harry slashed his wand at Draco. After a second of pause, all his hair fell off, with the exception of some really short hair on the back that spelled "Ponce." He looked like he was about to cry when Harry pushed him out of the compartment and locked the door.

"Harry! How can you say that about professor Lockheart? Look at all the stuff he's done in his books! He's a hero!"

"I don't care what he's done (or says he's done), he is flipping annoying." Hermione fumed for twenty minutes after that.

As it was darkening, the four of them decided to put on their robes. As Harry was pulling it on over his muggle clothes, Luna asked, "Harry, why are you wearing a bracelet?"

Looking down, Harry noticed that he was still wearing his restrictor. "Hmm, I didn't realize I was still wearing it. Oh well, I'll take it off at the next convenient opportunity." Luna did not question why this was not a convenient opportunity.

Finally, they arrived at Hogwarts. When they got out of the train, there were hundreds of carts ready to take them to the castle. Each cart was being pulled by one of the strangest creatures Harry had ever seen. They looked like winged skeleton horses. However, neither Ron nor Hermione could see them. Harry decided to ask Hagrid about them later.

Ron was initially mad at Harry and Hermione for seemingly hiding from him, until Hermione told him that they weren't hiding and that he had walked right past the compartment. She kept shooting suspicious glances at Harry.

When the Sorting finally got started, Luna was, as predicted, sorted into Ravenclaw. Ginny, to Ron's relief, was sorted into Gryffindor. Harry spent the rest of the feast nibbling on the delicious food, and

talking to everyone around. He was doing his best to ignore Lockheart, who was up at the head table waving at all the young witches.

Eventually, Dumbledore stood and made a speech. Lockheart looked as though he was going to speak when Dumbledore introduced him, however, Dumbledore did not realize this and continued on immediately.

An hour later found Harry sitting in the common room reading a book on animagi. According to the book, one must find one's form in one's magic through meditation before the training can begin. Harry was reviewing the part over the meditative state once more. When he was sure he understood, he closed his eyes. After an hour of relaxation, Harry succeeded in reaching the space of his own mind and magic. He was glad he was already an occlumense; the book had said that it could take days to reach this level if he were not. He could see his own body, but nothing else. This was the area of his mind that his subconscious had dedicated to his animagus form. Once he found it, he could build this area up to resemble his animal's natural habitat. The book had said that it was inadvisable to do so before-hand as it may not suit that particular animal, and as it may be harder to find his form if it is playing in a forest or something.

So Harry spent this time to walk around his mind and search for his animagus. By morning, he still had not found it, but he had expected that. This was a large area to look in. Everywhere he looked was black, so he couldn't be sure just how far he could see. It would probably take several nights to find.

The next day, Hermione, Ron, and Harry were in the courtyard at lunchtime talking about the two classes they had had so far (actually, Hermione was doing most of the talking, but Harry was at least paying attention so as not to get yelled at) when a tiny mouse like boy showed up. "Alright Harry? I'm - I'm Colin Creevey. I'm a Gryffindor, too. D'ya think it would be alright if - can I have a picture?" 'Ah, a fan. I suppose this is to be expected, like Ginny. I was kind of hoping all my fans would be giggly girls though. Ah, well.' While he was thinking, Colin had been chattering on about everything he had heard about

Harry. "And maybe, your friend could take it and I could stand next to you and later, you could sign it?"

Draco seemed to have heard that. "Signed photos! You're giving out signed photos, Potter?" Draco, in his school uniform wizarding hat (which no one ever wore because they were uncomfortable and tall), had gotten the attention of the whole courtyard. Big mistake.

"Nice hat, Draco. Bit warm though, isn't it?" Draco turned a darker red than Harry had ever seen, clutched the hat to his head with both hands, and took off running. The problem wasn't adverted, though.

"Who's giving out signed photos?" Lockheart noticed Harry. "Ah, shouldn't have asked. We meet again, Harry." Harry forced himself to appear confused.

"I'm sorry, we've met? Please excuse me, but who are you?" That worked.

"Funny. I'm your professor, Gilderoy Lockheart."

"Oh, right! Sorry professor, I'm terrible with faces. And no, I wasn't giving out signed photos. I was just about to tell Colin here that he shares a common room with me and, therefore, doesn't need a picture. Now, I'm about to be late to, well, your class, so I must be off." With that, Harry dragged Hermione away from the professor she was so attracted to. Through class, Harry was lightly probing Lockheart with Legilimency. Every time he talked about what he did in the books, Harry felt a lie. He knew that Lockheart hadn't done any of those things, but there seemed to be something deeper. It wasn't just a blatant lie; there were, after all, villages that had been saved from a werewolf and a banshee. Harry was going to figure it out.

Chapter 11

Almost two months later, it was the night before Halloween and Harry still had not found his form. He was sure that he should have found it by now, the book had said that he would. He was, by now, completely bored walking around a big blank area in his mind. He started thinking about other things.

He thought about when he had asked Hagrid about the threstals. It seemed that Hagrid's interest in scary animals was not limited to dragons and cerberi. He went on and on about all the different qualities of threstals and explained that the reason Harry could see them and the others couldn't was because Harry had seen someone die. 'Creepy.'

Harry decided to give up the search for tonight. Over the last month, he had been wandering the castle invisibly getting to know the layout as thoroughly as possible. He thought about maybe making a map, but decided not to. Once, at the beginning of the month, he had heard a low, scary voice saying "rip...tear...KILL..." He just assumed that Peeves was trying to annoy Filch again. Or that Peeves had succeeded in annoying Filch again, and now Filch was after blood.

Over the course of several weeks, Harry had gone into the library at night, silenced the restricted section like last year, and set as many of the books on the tables as possible with an open, empty book on top of each one. He would then charm a quill for each one and have them copy about twenty to thirty books at a time. He would then go about exploring the castle, leaving the books copying themselves under an illusion so as not to attract Filch's attention. By October thirtieth, Harry had the entire restricted section in his trunk.

At the feast that night, Harry and Hermione had a blast. They were both eating and talking with the rest of the Gryffindors. Ron seemed to need to kill the mood though, for Harry at least. He reminded them that it was exactly one year ago that they all became friends. Harry was going to tell him to shove off and that he had been friends with Hermione since before that, but decided to instead remind Ron why this was Hermione's first Halloween Feast. That shut him up.

The happy atmosphere continued until the end of the feast. When they were trudging up the stairs with the rest of the Gryffindors, Harry heard the voice again. It was significantly louder this time; it seemed to be just around the next corner yelling KILL! No one else seemed to hear it. When they turned the corner, there was a puddle of water covering the floor, reflecting an apparently dead cat and a message written in blood. The message said The Chamber of Secrets has been opened again. Enemies of the heir, beware. When no one else seemed capable of doing anything other than stare (except Draco, who was heard gleefully telling one of his thugs how cool he thought this was), Harry moved forward to inspect Mrs. Norris. When he was two feet from it, Filch showed up beat red.

"You!...You've murdered my cat! I'll kill you." When he started moving for Harry, Harry drew his wand, thinking he might need to defend himself.

Just when some other student opened his mouth to mention that Harry had been with everyone else the whole time, Dumbledore showed up. "That's enough. Mr. Filch, step away from Harry. Mr. Potter, put your wand away. Now, let us take this somewhere more private."

"Headmaster, I believe my office is closest!" exclaimed Lockheart, feeling important.

When they got to the office, everyone had to spend five minutes waiting for Dumbledore to figure out that the cat was not dead while ignoring Lockheart as he listed the various ways that the cat could have been killed that he just made up. Harry could tell that the cat was still alive; it still had magic in it.

Finally, Dumbledore straightened up and said to Filch, "She's not dead, Argus."

"She's, she's not? But why's she all stiff, like?"

"She has been petrified, though how, I cannot say."

"Ask him, it's him what's done it," he said, pointing at Harry.

"No I did not. Why would I petrify your cat? It's never done anything to me."

"Don't give me that. All you little beasts are the same. You all think you are better than me just because you can do magic and I can't. It's not my fault I was born a squib, but you all seem to hate me for it anyway. And now you have decided to punish me for it, too." Now Harry felt sorry for him.

"You're a squib? Man, sucks to be you. And I hate to tell you this, but that is not why the kids don't like you. They don't like you because you go around trying to get us into trouble and talking about how you wish you were allowed to chain us to a wall and whip us raw."

"Ha! So you admit to it, then!"

"I didn't touch your bloody cat!"

"Quiet!" Dumbledore silenced them. "Now, Harry, why were you standing next to the cat when Mr. Filch showed up?" Harry was, at first, upset that the Headmaster believed him guilty, too, until he realized that Dumbledore was just appeasing Filch.

"I was trying to help the retched creature! Now I'm just wishing I hadn't bothered."

"I'm sorry to have wasted your time, Harry. Please return to your common room."

When Harry got back, he told Hermione everything that happened. That night, Harry returned to the scene of the crime (completely invisible) and found Filch mopping up the water. He had the door to the adjacent girls' bathroom propped open and was pushing the water to the drain in the middle of the bathroom. There was a sad ghost who was crying impossible amounts of tears. She must have been the cause of all the water. Back in the hallway (Harry was levitating himself over the water), Harry noticed a line of spiders fleeing the scene.

Back in the common room, Harry thought about everything. He knew from the message on the wall that Slytherin's legendary secret chamber has been opened and that the monster within was what had petrified Mrs. Norris. What got him thinking was the part that said that it had been opened again. This was apparently not the first time, then. Suddenly, Harry remembered his visit from Dobby. Dobby had said that this was a danger that had not been seen for fifty years. Harry decided to research what happened fifty years ago, however, he couldn't find anything in the public records of the school from that time other than that someone named Tom Riddle had been awarded a Special Services to the School. He wondered if maybe Riddle had caught the villain. It was then that Harry noticed another notation near Riddle's award. Rubeus Hagrid had been expelled.

The next day, Harry was down at Hagrid's hut knocking on the door. He hadn't told Hermione this, yet, because he wanted to know what was going on, first.

"Oh, it's you, Harry. Well, come in, come in." When he had gotten the tea poured, Hagrid started up the conversation. "So, what can I do fer ya, Harry? Come ter talk about what's 'appened yesterday?"

Harry thought about his response for a second, but decided not to beat around the bush. "Partly. Hagrid, what were you expelled for?"

"Ah, well, I want ter be surprised at how much yeh seem ter know, but, as it's you, I don't think I am. I didn' open the Chamber. They though' it was me, on account o' the acromantula I was raisin' in castle, but Aragog never woulda hurt anybody, even if he had got out o' the cupboard I kept 'em in, which he didn'. I didn' even know where the Chamber was." By the end, Hagrid was looking a little desperate for Harry to believe him. He probably didn't think Harry would, which would explain why he had never told Harry this before.

"It's okay, Hagrid. I believe you. Was it Tom Riddle that turned you in?" Hagrid stopped dead.

"Who told yeh that name?" he whispered.

"I read it in the records near where it said that you got expelled."

"Well, yeah, he's the one tha' turned me in, alrigh'. Now, listen, that's not a name yeh go brandying about."

This confused Harry. He had never hear, nor read the name before. "Why?"

If Hagrid had looked uncomfortable when Harry asked his first question, then he was downright fearful now. Looking deeper, Harry saw a pair of red eyes and a memory of some high pitched laughter. Eyes widening, Harry said, "Voldemort?"

"Shh! Don't say tha' name! And yeah, though I'm not sure I shoulda told yeh that. Come ter think on it, I didn'. How do you keep doin' tha'? You and Dumbledore both always seem ter know everythin' before I even tell yeh. Don't get me wrong, he's a great man, and yer a great kid, but yeh both know more'n yeh should." Harry could hear the playfulness in his voice.

"Hagrid, I have a question. If the Headmaster back then thought that you opened the Chamber, why did he hire you as Gamekeeper?"

"Ah, well Dumbledore convinced him. He's been working as Transfiguration Professor then and convinced the Headmaster that I should stay, seeing as how I had no where else to go. He pointed out that there were no bite marks from an acromantula on the girl that had been killed and that an acromantula isn' even capable of petrifying someone." Well, that was news to Harry. 'I guess I missed the part of the records that show that a student died.'

Harry quoted Hagrid, "Great man, tha' Dumbledore."

"Aye, great man."

That night, Harry explained everything to Hermione. Ron had tried to include himself in the conversation, but decided that he wasn't interested at the mention of giant, man-eating spiders. Hermione was slightly disappointed that he didn't include her in the trip to Hagrid's, but understood that he had wanted to do it alone. He was a lot closer to Hagrid than she was.

Later, Harry tried, yet again to reach his form. He quickly got bored, so he decided to fix up this area of his mind. The book explained the building of the area as being done in layers. He figured that meant that if made it barren, he could add hills and trees and stuff later if he wanted. He closed his eyes and concentrated. He imagined a blue sky and a barren wasteland for as far as the eye could see. When he opened his eyes, everything was still black.

"Well, that didn't work." Harry decided to just walk some more, and ran right into a wall. When he landed on his back, he realized that he had succeeded to build the terrain, and that the blackness he had been seeing was the gargantuan black dragon that had been right in front of him.

"Hell, yeah!"

Chapter 12

It was a month later, and Harry was sitting on a rock near the top of one of the mountains he had built in his head. He was watching the dragon, learning its behavior and habits. He had built his mind to hold a variety of different terrains. He had plains and mountains and a forest. He thought a dragon would like mountains, and he made the forest incase the dragon wanted something to burn. Harry knew that he would.

Harry had decided that Lockheart must be taking the credit for what other people had done. That was the logical conclusion considering that Harry knew that Lockheart hadn't done the stuff, but he also knew it had been done. The only thing he wondered about was how he had kept the others from coming forth with their knowledge. Harry supposed the simplest answer was that Lockheart had memory charmed them, but Harry had a hard time imagining Lockheart as competent enough to handle a difficult charm like that.

The next day, he decided to give Hermione a talking to about Lockheart. She was too intelligent for this. She was the first one down the girls' stairs, like always. "Hey, Hermione, I've got a bone to pick with you." She looked slightly startled, not being able to remember any reason for this.

"Yeah? What is it?"

"I need to talk to you about Lockheart." He could already see her getting defensive.

"What about him? You going to apologize for the way you have been talking about him?"

"No, I need you to wise up and see him for what he is. A sham. A phony." Harry was going to continue giving synonyms until she responded, but she responded then.

"No, he isn't! How can you say such a thing?"

"Well, I suppose it is easier for me, seeing as how I'm not attracted to him like you are, but you are too intelligent to believe that that idiot could do any of the things in his books."

"What makes you think he is an idiot?"

"Just look at the first exam he gave us! 'What is my birthday. What is my favorite colour? What size underwear do I wear?' Now, that'll save me from the Dark Arts, that will. Lockheart's underwear."

"Harry, he was making sure that we read the books. If we remembered those details, we remembered the ones about defense too. You are just mad that you failed that test."

"Hermione, I failed that test on purpose. Granted, I didn't know the answers, but knew that what I put down wasn't the answers. I was making fun of him with my test." Harry started sniggering at the memory of what he put down on that test. Then he snapped out of it. "Fine, I'll prove it to you that he is a fake. Today, I want you to walk up to him, look him in the eye, and ask if he really did all the things in his books. I bet you anything that he lies to you."

"Fine, and when he tells the truth, you better apologize to him." Harry nodded his head slightly.

Classes went normal that day, until defense. Lockheart, who learned the first class that it was a bad idea to set a cage of pixies loose in a classroom, spent every class reenacting his books. He would always ask Harry to help him, and he would always get the same response: a particularly loud, fake snore. Today, however, Harry wasn't pretending to be asleep.

"Today, we are going to be reenacting my defeat of the Waga Waga Werewolf. Harry would you help me out?" Harry, pretending to just try to be helpful, pointed his wand at Lockheart's chair, and transfigured it into the likeness of a Werewolf (it wasn't actually a Werewolf; wouldn't change into a person, and was under Harry's control). Lockheart screamed like a little girl. The wolf just looked at him.

"Mr. Potter, I meant for you to help me by playing the part of the wolf!"

"Well, I'm not a particularly good actor. This will be much more convincing." Now the wolf was walking towards Lockheart, slightly menacingly.

Lockheart looked terrified. "Well, I believe you are scaring your class mates, so just get rid of it!" His voice squeaked at the end. Looking around, Harry noticed that most of the guys were watching happily, glad to see the idiot freak out. The girls, also, did not look afraid, though that was because they thought Lockheart could handle it.

"Oh, very well." And he dissolved the Werewolf. Lockheart seemed to forget that he was going to reenact anything. He told them to read their books, and he disappeared into his office. Several guys gave Harry a pat on the back.

Within the last two minutes of class, Lockheart returned looking fully recovered from his ordeal, if perhaps a little drunk. When the bell rang, everyone hurried out of the class except for Harry, Hermione, and Lockheart. Hermione shyly approached the professor.

"Professor Lockheart, didn't you really do all those heroic things in your books?"

Lockheart looked down beaming at one of his adoring fangirls and said, "Of course Hermione."

Hermione grew a thoughtful expression for a few moments. Finally, she sighed slightly, and said, "Well, you're still pretty," and walked away. Lockheart looked confused for a few moments before he decided that it wasn't important, because he was still pretty, and turned away. Harry laughed the whole way back to the common room, with Hermione chuckling occasionally, as well.

Back in the common room, Harry and Hermione got into yet another conversation about the Chamber. Hermione seemed convinced that Voldemort was behind it; basing most of her theory on what Harry had said that he felt in the book store. He told her that he hadn't felt the decaying energy since then, and that her theory pointed the culprit to either be Draco, or a Weasley. She suggested that they

investigate Draco. She wanted to brew some illegal potion to turn someone into someone else and infiltrate the Slytherin common room. Harry hadn't heard of the potion, but Hermione insisted that Snape had mentioned it in one of his classes. Harry checked the book she said it was in, and realized that it would take a month to brew it.

"Nah, lets just corner him and pull the answer out of his brain." Hermione really didn't like this solution. She still thought that Legilimency was an invasion of privacy. Harry just thought that Hermione was disappointed that she didn't get to brew the difficult potion.

The next day (after another night studying the dragon's habits), Harry and Hermione saw Draco turn to go into the bathroom, while the two big guys that are always following him continued to the Great Hall. Harry told Hermione to make sure that no one came in.

When he went into the bathroom, he checked the stalls. Only one was occupied. Harry stood near the door and waited. When Draco finished, he came out of the stall and noticed Harry.

"Well, well. If it isn't Potter. Getting a little scared for your mud-" Harry interrupted him.

"Now, Draco. Remember what happened the last time you used that word in front of me. Now, wash your hands, and then I've got something I want to talk to you about." Draco looked a little frightened now that he noticed that they were the only two in the bathroom.

When he had finished washing his hands, Draco tried to leave the bathroom. "Get out of my way, Potter. I've got more important things to do than talk to you," he said with a sneer.

Harry just smirked at him and raised his wand. Draco looked especially frightened now. Concentrating, Harry wordlessly cast Legilimens! Sifting through Draco's memories, Harry realized just how little Draco knew. Malfoy Senior was obviously behind this, even Draco knew that, but that was all Draco knew. Either Lucius didn't tell his son because he knew Dumbledore was a legilimencer, or he just didn't trust Mini-Malfoy. Either way, this was useless.

That evening, Harry and Hermione were sitting in the common room doing homework (Harry couldn't do it at night anymore, with his animagus work). Harry was finding it hard to ignore the chatter from the other students. There had been another attack today: some first year kid, a muggleborn. They were all getting rather jumpy.

A week later found most of the second years in the great hall, waiting for the new dueling club to begin. But all hopes Harry had of this being worth any amount of time went out the window when Lockheart walked in. He gave a pompous speech, then went on to tell how he would be putting on a demonstration with Professor Snape, who Harry had just noticed. Harry knew from the expression on Snape's face that Lockheart was going to be hurt. After Lockheart gave some useless information about dueling etiquette, the duel started. And finished. One disarming charm from Snape had Lockheart slammed against a wall without his wand.

When they started teaming up people, Snape got to Harry before Lockheart. He partnered Harry with Draco, of course, and then Hermione with Millicent Bulstrode. Harry was pleased to see that Draco was not pleased about this. When the duel began, Harry immediately batted away the little hex Draco had sent him and returned with one that made all of Draco's clothes come alive. His tie became rather snake-like (without teeth, but with a mouth), and all his clothes were either trying to eat him, or get away from him (which would leave him rather embarrassed). Before anything could really happen though, Snape cast a Finite Incantatem over the room.

Looking around, Harry noticed the carnage that comes with putting a bunch of second years together and telling them to throw spells at each other. Most people were supporting nose bleeds or a bruise. Millicent was lying on the ground, bound and gaged. Harry smiled.

Lockheart decided to impart more of his unparalleled wisdom, rather than acknowledge his mistake. "I think I'd better teach you how to block unfriendly spells. I think I need some volunteers. Longbottom and Finch-Fletchley, how about you?"

Snape insulted Neville, again, and volunteered Harry and Draco. Lockheart loved this idea, but Draco didn't. While Lockheart was showing just how not to deflect a curse, Snape was whispering something into Draco's ear that was giving him the confidence to sneer at Harry.

When the duel was signaled to begin, Draco immediately shouted, "Serpensortia!" launching a large black snake out of the tip of his wand. The crowd screamed. Harry briefly considered scaring the school by revealing his parselmouth abilities, but decided that it wasn't worth the trouble.

Snape was about to dispel the snake when Lockheart tossed everything into the shitter. Waving his wand, he threw the snake ten feet into the air. When it landed, it was extremely agitated. It immediately flew straight at Hermione, who was the closest to it. Before he had time to think about it, Harry yelled, "STOP!" The snake froze, and so did everyone else. 'Oops.'

What followed was an incredibly awkward silence. Snape, while staring at Harry with a strange, calculating look, vanished the snake. Everyone else just gawked. Harry decided that it was time to go.

When they had gotten to an unused classroom, Hermione pulled Harry inside. "Were you never going to tell me that you are a parselmouth?"

"Well, it is kind of hard to work into a sentence. 'Good day, Hermione. By the way, I'm a parselmouth.'"

"Yeah, but this is something rather big. I'd think you'd tell me sometime."

"I wasn't hiding it from you, but it never came up. I haven't spoken to a snake since I found a grass snake in the yard about four years ago. It's not a big part of my life, or anything." Hermione seemed to understand that and calmed down. She hadn't been very upset in the first place.

"You know that everyone is going to think you are Slytherin's heir, right?"

"Hermione, I don't even know my grandparents' names. For all I know, I am. Besides, this should be fun: seeing all the stupid people running away as I walk down a corridor." Hermione just rolled her eyes and shook her head. Then Ron found them.

"Why didn't you ever tell me you were a parselmouth?" He seemed angry. Harry had been completely ignoring him since the beginning of the school year. He didn't see any reason to stop now.

Chapter 13

The next month proved Harry correct. Walking down a hallway was all it took to get every eye turned to him, and people would get out of his way, even if they weren't in his way. That may have had something to do with Fred and George, though. They took it upon themselves to warn everyone to stay away from the terribly frightening second year. They would march in front of him yelling, "Get out of the way! Murdering snake man coming through! Don't piss him off, or he'll sic his killer cobra on you!" Harry, of course, went right along with it, occasionally pointing to a student (usually a fifth through seventh year) and say something to the effect of, "Watch it! You almost bumped me!" Then he'd snicker.

The animagus training was progressing wonderfully. The book said that this stage would normally take from a year and a half to two and a half years. Harry figured that he would probably get through it sooner than that, considering that he trained all night, every night.

One thing that couldn't figure was what the monster was. It was obviously a snake, but one that could either petrify or kill without leaving any marks? He tried looking into the girl that Hagrid had said died, but couldn't find anything other than that her name was Myrtle Manfree.

There was also very little on Riddle. He was Head Boy and a Prefect, and he had top grades in everything. Then he disappeared. There was a brief mention in one of the old graduate's books (a kind of year book they give to the seventh years when they graduate) about him going to work at some shop, but Harry knew that couldn't have lasted long.

Ron was being very strange. He seemed to be actively avoiding Harry. Harry assumed that it was because he believed Harry actually was the one setting a monster loose on the school. Harry didn't really care; he was just pleased not to have to do anything other than show up to make him leave. He decided it was time for another talk with Hermione.

"Hermione, I've got a bone to pick with you." She looked at him confused, wondering what it could be this time.

"I'm not fawning over Lockhart any more."

"I know, and that's very good, but that's not what this is about." She just looked at him until he continued. "I thought you would stop fawning over stupid, moronic prats in general, rather than Lockhart specifically."

"I don't think I am fawning over anyone at all, actually." She seemed really confused, thinking hard about the past several days.

"I'm talking about Ron." And suddenly she understood.

"I don't faun over Ron, Harry. He's just a friend."

"No, you would never be friends with such an imbecile. However, you have proven that you will let an infatuation blind you to a person's innate stupidity. Ron is a fool." Hermione sighed.

"I know he's not the brightest spark from the wand, but he is a good person."

"I don't care if he's the venerable pope; he annoys the shit out of me." It seemed that Hermione had given up telling him to watch his language.

"Well, he's been avoiding you, so I won't be seeing him anyway. And he has tried to warn me to avoid you a couple of times, too, because I'm muggleborn, and you were obviously telling that snake to attack me at the dueling club. I suppose you're right. I'm not going to be mean to him, but we won't hang out with him anymore." 'Must remember to do a happy dance when there aren't so many people watching.'

Harry was glad that Ron was going to be going home for the holidays. That meant that he would be gone for the next two weeks. Hermione was staying though, and Harry was hoping that, when Ron realized that she was staying here with Harry, he would try to convince her to

go home, thus starting the conversation where Hermione tells him he is no longer welcome in her presence. Harry intended to witness that conversation.

That night, at dinner, Luna Lovegood walked up to Harry at the Gryffindor table. "Harry, could you unpetrify Jermy Prascal, please?"

Harry looked up and asked, "Who's Jermy Prascal?"

"He's the Gryffindor first year boy you petrified a while back. He is a friend of mine." Like always, Luna was dead serious.

Harry smiled. "I'm sorry, Luna. I rather don't know how to unpetrify anyone. And I hate to tell you this, but I'm not the one who petrified him."

"Did you tell a monster to do it?"

"I'm afraid I don't know how the students are getting petrified. Sorry to be of so little help, Luna."

She smiled, sadly. "It is alright, Harry. If you ever do figure out how to unpetrify the students, please do." Harry nodded. He went back to eating, ignoring the fact that the entire Hall was staring at him.

Finally, the holidays were upon them. That morning, Ron came up to Hermione and asked to speak with her. When she got up to go talk with him, Harry followed. Ron led her to an unused classroom. When he saw Harry sitting in the room with Hermione, his expression grew cold.

"Could you excuse us, Harry? This is private." His face was bright red, and he seemed inches from punching Harry.

"Oh, of course. How rude of me." Harry turned himself invisible. "There, I'm gone." He was vaguely surprised when Ron didn't believe him.

"I'm serious, get out." Harry rolled his eyes and opened and closed the door. That seemed to convince Ron. Hermione, why are you

staying here for the break. You and Harry will be the only Gryffindors here. Who knows what kind of terrible things he would do to you?"

Hermione was suddenly very angry at Ron. "Ron, if you truly believe that Harry would ever hurt me, then you are as stupid as Harry is always saying you are." At this, Harry's face was covered in a grin. "Harry is not the one attacking the students, Ron. He doesn't have anything against muggleborns. Hell, his MOTHER was muggleborn, you imbecile!" Hermione took some time to calm her self down. "Look, I'm sorry I yelled at you. But Harry is my best friend. If you can't get along, then I'm going to ask you to leave me alone." Harry decided to make himself visible. He was standing behind Hermione's shoulder, looking at Ron with a smirk. Ron's face was glowing by now, and the sight of Harry sent him hurrying out the door. Harry decided to break the silence.

"Glad that's over." Hermione shrieked and spun around.

"Don't sneak up on me like that! You scared the hell out of me!" Harry smiled at her.

"Watch you language." He then ducked the swing she made at him. "Woah, calm down. Lets go throw snowballs at the students that are leaving."

"No, Harry. Let's just go back to the common room."

That night, Harry and Hermione were researching magical snakes. They were trying to figure out one that could petrify or kill without leaving any marks. After three hours, Hermione was the one to find it.

"Here it is! Of the many fearsome beasts and monsters that roam our land, there is none more curious or more deadly than the Basilisk, known also as the King of Serpents. This snake, which may reach gigantic size and live many hundreds of years, is born from a chicken's egg, hatched beneath a toad. Its methods of killing are most wondrous, for aside from its deadly and venomous fangs, the Basilisk has a murderous stare, and all who are fixed with the beam of its eye shall suffer instant death. Spiders flee before the Basilisk, for it is their mortal enemy, and the Basilisk flees only from the

crowing of the rooster, which is fatal to it. Oh, this is it! You said that the spiders were fleeing the scene at the first attack. And Hagrid told me that the roosters were killed earlier in the year."

"Yeah, but no one had died. They've all been petrified."

"Ummm...Oh! They didn't see it directly. The cat probably saw it in the reflection of the water that was on the ground, and the other kid seemed to have been looking out the window when he saw it. It was probably the reflection too."

"Huh. Well, what do we do with this information?"

"I think we should tell Professor Dumbledore."

"Well, I can't think of a reason not to, so okay. Tomorrow then."

The next day, Harry and Hermione found themselves at the teachers' table at breakfast. Harry said, "We need to talk to you, professor." He seemed to know what it was about already and led them to his office. His office was filled with lots of silvery gadgets and doodads. Just behind the desk stood a perch, on which was a large red and gold bird. "Is that a phoenix, sir?"

"Why, yes it is, Mr. Potter. Your knowledge of the magical world astounds me every time I speak to you, it seems."

"Well, I decided to look phoenixes up after Mr. Ollivander told me that my wand had a phoenix feather core."

"Ahh, yes. Mr. Ollivander informed me that you had gotten the other one." Harry was a bit surprised at that.

"Why did he tell you that, sir?"

"Well, Harry, this is the phoenix that gave the feathers for those two wands."

"Oh, no way! That's awesome! I knew I liked that bird."

"Now, why don't we get back to why we are here?"

"Oh, right. Hermione and I think that the creature attacking students is a basilisk."

Dumbledore sat up a little straighter. "And why do you think that?"

Hermione decided to take it from there. She told him all her reasoning after telling him about reading about basilisks last night. Dumbledore seem to think for a moment. "Yes, but then why has no one noticed it before now? A basilisk that old would be fifty feet by now." Harry hadn't thought of that, but apparently Hermione had.

"I think it is going through the pipes, sir. Harry says he's heard a scary voice talking about killing and such, but he could never tell where it was coming from. I believe it was in the walls."

"Ah, yes. But then, the entrance..." He seemed deep in thought. Harry decided to bring him back to reality.

"Sir?"

"Oh, I was considering the possibility of the entrance being located in one of the school's bathrooms."

"Oh. Wait, wasn't the girl that died fifty years ago found in the bathroom?"

Dumbledore's face lit up in recognition. Then he glanced at Harry in askance. "How do you know about what happened then?"

"It was in the records, sir." Dumbledore nodded at that.

"Well, lets go check out that bathroom." Hermione was shocked.

"Sir? You are taking us with you?" The headmaster smiled at her.

"I think I may need a parselmouth to open the door. Do not worry, Miss Granger. We shall not be venturing into the Chamber today. I am just going to set up a trip ward to tell me when someone does

enter it. I need to catch the person doing this." Twenty minutes later, during which Harry realized that the sad ghost was Myrtle Manfree, and Harry and Hermione were headed back to the Gryffindor common room.

Chapter 14

Harry was very excited. You probably couldn't tell by looking at him (occlumency, or natural apathy, helps to keep one's face blank), but he was really looking forward to going with Dumbledore to the Chamber of Secrets. He knew he should be frightened, Basilisks are rather dangerous creatures, but his life has been so torturously monotonous so far (barring the end of the last school year) that he felt he was justified in looking forward to a battle for survival with a one thousand year old, fifty foot serpent.

His excitement may have been part of the reason he sought out a confrontation with Lockhart. It was the holidays so Harry had a difficult time finding the preening poof, but he eventually located him in the Astronomy tower flirting with an especially uninterested Professor Sinistra.

"Professor Lockhart, may I have a word with you?" Lockhart beamed at Harry, apparently glad that Harry didn't seem to be ignoring him any longer and seemed to have forgiven Harry for setting a transfigured werewolf on him.

"Certainly, my boy! What can I do for you?" Professor Sinistra suddenly remembered an urgent...something...that she had to do while Lockhart's attention was on something else, and she hurried away.

Harry just smiled. "Can you teach me the Memory Charm? I happen to know you are particularly good at it." He, of course, already knew the Memory Charm, and Lockhart was, of course, not particularly adept at it. Rather than merely erase specific memories, he tended to blank the entire hard drive. Harry was only using this as an introduction to the argument that would end with the firing of the worst teacher to date. However, Lockhart, apparently, didn't catch on.

"Oh, I'm not sure Harry. It is a rather dangerous spell for a second year." Harry just blinked.

"God, you're dumb. I was trying to point out that I am aware that you have been stealing the credit for the deeds performed in your books,

thereby starting a confrontation. Do you seriously believe that any one of your students believe that you are anything other than an incompetent pretty-boy with an ego out-weighting their brain and their magical core together? The only spell you have any proficiency with at all is the Memory Charm, and you can't even get that right." Judging from the candy-apple red of Lockhart's face, Harry had succeeded in irking him.

"Why you little brat. I take you under my wing and try to teach you to handle your fame, and this is how you repay me? I may not have mastered deleting specific memories, but the version of the spell that I have mastered is more than enough to prevent you from spreading what you seem to have figured out. Obliviate!" Harry had already drawn his wand when Lockhart shouted the spell. Harry merely had to put up a shield charm to reflect it back at the faux-hero. He then stunned him so that he wouldn't wander off the edge of the tower, and went to fetch Dumbledore. Dumbledore did not seem surprised to learn that Lockhart was a fake (only an idiot or a fangirl would be) and merely checked the last spells of both wands to verify Harry's story. That was, in fact, the very reason Harry had used his wand to cast the shield charm. Some magic, shields, wards, and self affecting spells for example, worked better wandlessly because they employed a more dispersed field of magic. Spells that affect a specific object were best cast either by wand or by touch. Offensive spells were better with a wand or other focus.

When Hermione learned what Harry had done, she was initially shocked that Lockhart had actually tried to erase Harry's whole mind, but soon realized that Harry had sought him out intending to goad him into doing exactly that. Harry was surprised that Hermione did not seem upset that he had intentionally set into motion events that would end in the permanent mental disablement of another, and when questioned about it, she replied that she was coming to expect these kind of things from Harry. He took that to mean that he was a positive influence on her, and that he had successfully pulled the stick from her ass.

The rest of the Holidays passed remarkably better than last year's, and Harry suspected he knew why. The duo spent a lot of time with Hagrid. They would talk about the creatures Hagrid had raised during

his life, and they would discuss the courses that Harry and Hermione planned to take the next year. Hermione said that she was going to sign up for everything on the list of OWL exam courses. Harry decided to skip some of the less interesting ones and only take the Magical Creatures course and the Ancient Runes course. He also wanted to take a course listed for learning languages, but the sheet said that it didn't have an exam. He asked Hagrid.

"Ah, well they don' really need an exam fer tha' one. There are so many languages that they use some ritual or sommat to jest put the knowledge into yer brain. They gotta spread it out so's it don't damage yer mind. 'S why some witches and wizards are able ter know hundreds o' languages. The more you sign up ter learn, the longer yeh stay in the class. If'n yeh sign up for more'n about a hundred, yeh gotta continue take'n the course after yeh graduate. Can' stop in the middle."

"They can just put the knowledge into your mind? Why don't they just do that for all the classes?"

It was Hermione who answered him. "There is a special part of the brain dedicated to languages. I imagine that language is the only thing they can do it for." Harry thought that made sense. He decided to take the course, though Hermione didn't. She didn't like the idea of someone messing with her mind.

For Harry, Christmas was great. He didn't get anything from the Weasleys, though he did get a letter from the twins saying that was because Ron was spreading lies to his parents. They assured him that Ron's hair was inexplicably green and refused to change back.

Hagrid gave him a belt made from an empath chameleon. It was, essentially, a mood ring, and upon putting it on, Harry discovered that he was feeling turquoise.

Hermione got him a book on past wizards who have become animagi. Harry spent quite a while looking through the section that covered magical creature transformations. No one had ever been a dragon before (at least, as far as the author knew), though it was not because of the power necessary. The author stipulated that it was

because no one's personality corresponded, that dragons and humans were just too different. Just then, Hermione burst into the room.

"Hey. I was just looking through this book you got me. Did you read it?" She shook her head in the negative. "Well, the author says that there hasn't ever been a dragon animagus before. Says that's because no one's personality is dragonish enough."

Hermione frowned. "Really? I'd have thought it was because of the power necessary."

"Nah, he says that there have been phoenix animagi before and that that takes more power."

"Hmm." She was scowling in concentration. "Well, dragons sleep a lot. You don't sleep hardly at all, but you do spend a lot of time doing nothing." Harry smiled, proud of his laziness. "Dragons are aggressive towards anything that they don't like, and you have just destroyed Lockhart's mind, not to mention your attitude towards Ron." Harry's smile grew. "Dragons are curious and will investigate any odd sound or smell, and you seem to have discovered more of the castle's secrets in the last year and a half than most of the seventh years have in their time here." Harry was now nodding and smiling. "And dragons are very protective. I think you are too, considering that you are already nearly a master occlumense and have warded your area of your dorm room." It was then that Harry realized that she was still standing outside the ward around his bed, and he apologetically keyed her into the wards.

"Well, that's a lot of similarities. I can't wait until I start to breath fire," Harry said with a smile.

Hermione just nodded. "Oh, yes, I forgot to mention that you are a pyromaniac."

Chapter 15

The holidays were over and all the students back. Ron was utterly flabberghasted that no one had been attacked over the break (barring Lockhart, but Ron didn't really care about him). Almost all the students were thrilled at the loss of the Defence teacher, except for a few who were broken-hearted. Dumbledore hadn't had the heart to tell them that he Lockhart was a fake.

Harry, meanwhile, was getting pretty damn impatient. He wanted to fight a basilisk, damnit! Very few people still believed him to be the Heir. He decided to spend a few minutes every day taunting the Heir (by yelling through the school) that Harry could take him. He was really hoping for an attack.

Defence classes were much better, lately. The higher level students (prefects and the like) were teaching the younger ones, and Dumbledore himself was teaching the upper years. At least until he found a replacement. Harry thought this was great because the older students never took attendance. The first years had to show up because Percy Weasley was their teacher, but Harry rarely went.

Draco seemed to be quite a bit smarter than Ron. Ron still hadn't learned not to bother Harry (Harry had by now permanently turned Ron's hair pink and given him a nice pair of boobs). Draco, on the other hand seemed to finally accept the Slytherin motto that a powerful friend is a good friend. He was playing the role of kiss-ass very nicely. When Harry told him that he couldn't possibly forgive Draco until Hermione did, Draco reluctantly swallowed his pride and started kissing Hermione's ass, too. At Harry's suggestion, she was drawing out the act of forgiving Draco, and demanding retrobution, instead. It was, in her words, great fun. Harry considered himself to be a wonderful person for this. He was doing more than anyone else to bridge the gap between the two houses, as well as end the prejudice of muggleborns.

Finally, Harry was called to the Headmaster's office. When he arrived, Dumbledore was already on his way out. "Come quickly, Harry. The Heir is already in the Chamber, but we will still be able to catch him before he leaves it." Harry didn't wonder why Dumbledore was

convinced that it was a male. 'He of all people would know Voldemort's real identity. He probably know's his geneology, too.'

When they arrived at the sink, Dumbledore said, "There, now. Just open the sink, and go back to the Tower." Harry's eyes narrowed, slightly.

"Open." Immediately, the one hundred and sixty year old man jumped down the hole and slid to the Chamber of Secrets. Harry was right behind him.

"Harry! I cannot possibly put you into this much danger! Return to the surface, immediately!" Harry just looked at him. "I am not joking, young man." Anything else that was to be said was cut off as they heard what was unmistakably the voice of a little girl.

"I'll kill someone this time, I just know it. Then, maybe, I'll somehow trick that arrogant whelp Potter into coming down here." Then Harry and Dumbledore got a good look at Ginny Weasley. Both were shocked, to say the least. Neither seemed as shocked, though, as Ginny herself. Harry heard her say, under her breath, "Damn! I'm not strong enough for this yet!" After that, she promptly fainted. The Headmaster immediately started heading towards her, but halted as soon as they both heard the sound of something very large sliding towards them.

Dumbledore immediately erected some sort of ward around his eyes. Harry just closed his. He immediately called out, "Hello?"

"A Parselmouth? An I thought only those who share the blood of my master could do that. No matter, I can smell that you are not an Heir, so I will just despende of you."

"Um, the Basilisk doesn't seem to follow the rule that it must obey a Parselmouth."

Dumbledore sighed. "No I didn't think it would. It has standing orders from Slytherin. It doesn't have to follow your's. It is why I did not suggest bringing you."

Meanwhile, Harry could feel a powerful magic belting him in the eyelids. Before he even gave it a thought, he started absorbing it. Rather than just applying it to his core, though, he instinctively knew to just layer it through his eyes. When he was done, he cautiously opened his eyes. He immediately came face to face with the biggest snake he would ever see. It seemed suprized when he didn't fall over dead.

"Well, human, it seems that I will just have to do this the old fashioned way." And he struck.

Harry immediately dived out of the way. While he was still rolling, Dumbledore conjured a rooster. However, the basilisk quickly sensed it, and knocked Dumbledore against the wall with his tail. Fawkes appeared above his master and started crying on the bleeding headwound. He was still unconscious, but he would live.

Harry applied a flying charm to him self. It was the same one that was used on brooms. He was soaring around the Chamber, trying to not die, while attempting to get the rooster to crow.

"Crow you God-damned piece of poultry! You stupid stuffed feather duster! Crow damnit!" He was firing sparks at it and anything else he could think of, while dodging a great big snake. Finally, he ignored the rooster and started trying to kill the basilisk himself. The problem with that plan was that Basilisks were extremely resistant to magic. Even the killing curse just pissed it off. Harry took to conjuring spikes and aiming at the beast's eyes. The think was just too fast though. Eventually, Fawkes decided that he could do no more for his master and started helping. Within ten minutes, the Basilisk was blind. After that, it wasn't to difficult to bring a portion of the ceiling down on it's head. When Harry was sure that it was dead, he went and checked out Ginny. He could feel the gross magic that he felt before with her. However, instead of flowing through her limbs, as it had been when he first saw her today, it seemed to rest solely in her pocket. 'How odd.'

When he looked, he found a book in her pocket that seemed to be the source. It was a diary, with the name 'Tom Riddle' written in it. Remembering what it felt like to absorb the Basilisk's magic, he did

the same to all the magic in this book, merging it with his own core. Once it was dry, there was a faint scream that sounded far away. Harry was sure that the book was dead.

Later, Harry was sitting in the Headmaster's office. The Weasley's had just left (after a thorough apology, which he only pretended to accept). Harry had been convinced by the Headmaster to wear an illusion over his eyes. Apparently, they now glowed and had slits for pupils. Hermione was sitting next to him, clearly upset at being left out, but equally grateful at not having been made to make the decision to either fight a fifty foot snake that can kill with its eyes or abandon Harry. Harry was sure that it was time for another heart-to-heart with the Headmaster like the one at the end of last year. Dumbledore was peering sternly at Harry.

"Miss Granger, could you wait outside, please?"

Hermione seemed to think Harry was in trouble. She would have been defending him, but she didn't know why he was in trouble. She would have refused to leave because she wanted to know what was going on, but she was in no position to do so. When she had left, Dumbledore sighed.

"Mr. Potter, last year you told me that you didn't know how you had absorbed the Stone. At the time, I believed you. I'm not sure I do, anymore."

'Ah, so that's what this is.' "Sir, I was completely honest when I said that. However, since then, I have looked into it and discovered how to replicate the incident." Dumbledore seemed mollified by that.

He smiled and said, "I believe you. Would you care to explain it to me?" Harry decided to go ahead and tell him about his freaky magic eating. Dumbledore was shocked, but agreed to not tell anyone. People would not want someone who could eat their magic to exist. After a moment, he asked, "I gather that it is during one of these sleepless nights that you learned Occlumency?"

Harry was surprised, but of course, didn't show it. "Occlumency?"

Dumbledore just smiled and said, "You are an excellent Occlumens, Harry, however, Hermione isn't quite as good." Harry raised an eyebrow and Dumbledore added, "Good enough to keep me from learning anything, but not good enough to keep me from suspecting any thing. 'Ah.'"

A while later found Harry and Hermione harvesting parts off of a big dead Basilisk. Several of the really old and powerful potions and rituals from the Restricted section books required them. Most providers bred Basilisks and killed them immediately after they hatch. Parts from a one thousand year old specimen should be much more potent.

While they were working, Harry was filling Hermione in on what happened. She, of course, had questions. "If you absorbed the Basilisk's killer eye power, can you do it, too?"

That gave Harry something to think about. "Hmm. I hadn't considered it. I suppose I could, but I'm not sure I want to risk it. It might destroy my weak human eyes."

Hermione nodded. "And how did you apply that flying charm to yourself? I sincerely hope you didn't control the direction and speed with your grip."

When Harry stopped laughing, he replied, "No. The charm works off of the flier's will. The grip and such is just like the wand movements and incantations for spells. For the weak-minded. What I wish I had asked Dumbledore, though, is how he had planned on getting that rooster to crow. I sure as hell couldn't."

Hermione laughed. "He probably would have use the Imperious Curse. It's only illegal to use against humans, you know." Harry immediately began to plan the fall of the Dark Lord.

Chapter 16

It was a couple months after the slaying of the Basilisk, and Harry was more famous than ever. He had decided that if you had to be famous, then it was best to be so for something awesome like felling fearsome beasts and evil dark lords.

He had spent considerable time, in the last six weeks, studying the theory and application of warding. He had read through several books before he found one that mentioned the ones he wanted. He was looking for one that would block out the ministry from detecting the use of magic within Number 4, Private Drive. Oddly enough, it was found in a security manual for over protective mothers. It would tell the control target whenever someone entered the wards who wasn't supposed to be there, whenever someone who was supposed to be there was in any trouble, and, if the control concentrated, where everyone in the wards was. There was a note at the bottom warning the over protected mother that, while she could use it to monitor her children's use of magic, the wards would block the Ministry from detecting anything in the vicinity, there by delaying their response time in an emergency. Harry thought it was wonderful and started to memorize it and practice it right away.

Since he had saved her, Ginny Weasley's crush seemed to have multiplied by seven or eight times. Several times her accidental magic placed an illusion of a knight in shining armor on him. He wanted very much to make her stop, but was reluctant to break the heart of an eleven year old girl. It was only when he reminded himself that he was only twelve that he decided to go ahead.

"Ginny?" She showed him every one of her teeth in the smile she gave him.

"Yes, Harry?"

"Stop following me." Her smile dimmed.

"But, you're my boyfriend."

"No, I'm not. You are a fangirl. A groupie. And while a few stalker-like tendencies are in your job description, you take it too far." Now she looked like she was about to cry.

"I - I'm sorry."

"Yes, alright. Now run along," Harry said, making little shoo-shooing movements with his hands.

Hermione, having witnessed the entire scene, said, "Harry, that was very mean."

"I know."

"Well, hopefully she'll leave us alone, now. I still don't like it thought." Harry knew that Hermione wasn't upset. She was just trying to act like she was because she thought she should be.

Meanwhile, Ron was acting strangely. Like he was trying to pretend that Harry didn't exist. It was probably supposed to hurt Harry's feelings, but Harry couldn't be happier with this development. Indeed, he was only hoping for the chance to break Ron's heart, as well.

A couple weeks later, the last week of school, Ginny resumed her role as fangirl #1. She also started spending a lot of time around the small boy with the camera that introduced himself to Harry earlier in the year.

Gryffindor won the house championship again, and Draco had to spend a few minutes congratulating Harry and Hermione for it.

Harry and Hermione rode with Luna Lovegood on the way back to London. Hermione and Luna were engaged in a debate the whole ride about the factuality of The Quibbler. Harry would usually agree with Hermione, but he always liked Luna's explanations of things better.

Finally, he was back at the Dursleys and he put up his new wards as soon as he got into his room. They were placed with a one-hundred meter radius, just to be on the safe side. The Dursleys were being

very distant. Harry knew that they had planned to invite his "aunt" Marge, but had canceled due to his flagrant use of magic around the house. They never asked him to help around the house either, knowing that he would use his unnaturalness to get out of doing a bit of actual work. Harry was rather enjoying himself.

On his birthday, Harry received a letter from school, as usual. However, this time, it came with a permission slip to visit the village near the school. Harry cast a confundus charm on his uncle and told him it was a form to allow corporal punishment on Harry. Vernon readily signed.

Now that he had his list, Harry applied a flying charm to himself and turned himself invisible. Half an hour and some conjured goggles later, and Harry was walking down Diagon Alley. When he got to the bank, he withdrew some gold from some grumpy Gringots goblins and proceeded to the book store. When he got there, however, he noticed wanted posters covering the door. A man named Sirius Black had escaped from the inescapable Azkaban Prison. The name sounded vaguely familiar, but Harry couldn't place it. After he updated his collection with about twenty new books, he bought himself some new clothes, having worn his current ones out, and restocked his potions supply and ingredients. He then called it a day.

On the last night before the new semester, Harry returned to the animagus plane in his mind to further study the behavior patterns of dragons. Rather than watching the dragon, as he had done every time before, when he entered this time, he was inside the dragon's mind. After several minutes of rejoicing, Harry began his battle with the dragon's mind. According to the book, this portion of his training would be complete when he was able to control the dragon, rather than just experiencing everything the dragon experienced while going about his dragon business.

The next day found Harry and Hermione sitting with Luna on the train back to Hogwarts. Hermione informed him of everything she had heard about Sirius Black and the dementors chasing him. Harry wondered what it was about dementors that made every author he had read seem very frightened of them. They had said that dementors make you relive your worst memories, but he had done

that while he was working on his Occlumency, and it wasn't so bad. And he had some pretty terrible memories.

Luna interrupted his thoughts. "Harry, where did you get your bracelet? You seem very fond of it, and I think I might like to get myself one."

Looking down, he realized that she had once again caught him wearing his power regulator. "Luna, this is a power suppresser. It is used so that I don't seem to be as powerful as I really am."

Luna looked confused. "You don't seem to type to downplay his own strengths. Why do you wear it?" Harry chuckled.

"You're right, I'm not. I wear it during the summer so that I don't accidentally blow up the house or something. I just forgot to take it off earlier." With that, he removed the band. His aura was very similar to last time he saw it, but there was distinctly less white and silver, and now green had been added. Hermione thought it looked amazing, and Luna thought it looked neat. Harry wondered if this would show up in The Quibbler. He could only hope.

Just after nightfall, the train slowed to a stop in the middle of nowhere. At first, they were confused, until Harry looked down the aisle and saw what could only be dementors. He returned to the compartment and informed the girls that the train was being checked for Sirius Black. When the door opened, Harry felt distinctly cooler (which was good, because he had been getting rather warm) and could feel the creature tugging on his memories. He ignored it and turned to Hermione and Luna. Hermione looked fine, but Luna was clutching Hermione's arm with her eyes closed, shivering. Rather than let it go on, Harry started pulling on the dementor's magic and applied it to his own magical core. He didn't try to keep its properties, like he did to the Basilisk's, because he didn't want to torture everyone he met. The dementor's posture gradually got worse and worse, until it turn tail and ran. Or glided very quickly. Not much later, the train started back up, and the trolley lady started passing out free chocolate frogs, saying that chocolate was a remedy for the dementors' power.

Later, when Harry was walking up the steps toward the Great Hall, Draco ran up and said, "Hey Harry! Some kids were saying on the train that they saw a dementor fleeing from your compartment. What did you do to it?" He seemed very excited and very afraid at the same time.

"Nothing, Draco. Dementor's are just smart enough to know of whom they should be afraid." Draco just went to his seat at the Slytherin table in awe. Harry was sure that most of the Slytherins would be listening to Draco (willingly or not) about how Harry Potter had frightened the dementor off of the train just by looking at them. 'Now that I think about it, that could sound like an insult. He better not say it that way.'

Just then, Professor McGonagall came up and asked Hermione to see her in private. Hermione returned with an object of great power hanging around her neck. She just looked at Harry and said, "I'll tell you later."

And, she did. Harry knew that he had a trying year ahead of him if he was supposed to somehow resist the temptation to sneak into Hermione's room at night and borrow the time turner.

Chapter 17

The next day, Harry found out that Ron had forgiven him.

"Hey, Harry. Did you hear the news?" Harry didn't look up from his book.

"Yes. So there's no reason to tell me." Ron did anyway.

"Yeah, my dad won the Thousand Galleon Draw!"

"Good for your dad."

"Yeah, so we took a trip to Egypt to visit my brother Bill, and we visited the pyramids and the tombs, and Fred and George tried to lock me in a pyramid!" He seemed smug about that.

Harry finally looked up from his book and saw Fred and George sitting not far away listening to Ron. Harry said to them, "Impenetratio."

"What?" Fred asked.

"It's a very strong locking charm. For next time." They both laughed as Ron stormed off.

At breakfast, Harry and Hermione received their schedules. They had both signed up for Care for Magical Creatures as well as Ancient Runes. Harry, though, was also taking the languages course, and Hermione was taking Arithmancy and Divination. Looking at her schedule, Harry said, "Hermione, if you have trouble with this, you know I'm willing to help."

"Of course. But I won't have trouble."

In Defense Against the Dark Arts, Professor Lupin took them to a store room in the dungeons. There, they were going to be learning about, and facing a bogart. Harry was more interested in learning about Lupin. He was emitting a strange, almost feral, energy. Harry was sure that he was not entirely human. Most of the students got to face their fears, but just as Harry was going to get to find out of what

he was most afraid, (he honestly didn't know, so he was kinda looking forward to it) Lupin jumped in and finished it. Lupin was afraid of the moon.

With almost over, Harry raised his hand. When Lupin nodded at him, he asked, "Professor, are you going to be teaching us the charm that repels dementors?"

Lupin chuckled. "From what I hear, Harry, you don't need it."

Keeping a straight face, Harry said, "I'm afraid that lethifolds might not be as easily frightened as dementors."

"I don't know, Harry. It is an incredibly advanced spell."

"But it would be really good to know, what with all the floating fright fiends around." Harry was getting the hang of this alliteration thing.

"Hmm. Alright. I'll cover it next class. Class dismissed!"

Care for Magical Creatures went smoothly. Hagrid was ecstatic about becoming a professor. Draco seemed less ecstatic, but upon witnessing the comradery between Harry and Hagrid, he congratulated the half-giant and was silent through the lesson. Harry was sure the best part of the lesson was riding a hippogryph.

After class, Harry and Hermione went to lunch and Hermione went back in time. Harry decided that it was a good time to question Lupin.

"Ah, hello Harry. Come in and have a seat." When they were both seated, he asked, "So, what can I do for you?"

"I was wondering why you didn't let me fight the bogart."

"Oh. Well, I assumed it would take the form of Lord Voldemort. Was I wrong?"

"Yes. I really can't think of anything that I'm afraid of. I was kind of hoping to find out."

"Sorry about that. Was that the only reason for your visit?"

"No. My last two Defense teachers turned out to be evil. I was hoping for a chance to make sure that you aren't."

"Ah. Well, what have you decided?"

"I'm not sure yet. Would you ever consider erasing a child's entire memory?"

"No."

"Even if he had discovered that you were a liar and that you had built your career on the stolen experiences of others?"

"Even then." He seemed amused by Harry's test.

"Would you ever share your soul with Voldemort?"

That one startled him. "No. Did one of your teachers do that?"

"Yep, first year. Now would you ever try to steal the Philosopher's Stone?"

"No. I can't believe this has all happened at this school."

"Well, you seem better than my last two teachers. I hope you can keep it up." And Harry left.

Language class was great. All that you really had to do was come to class and sit in a special chair. While doing that, you could read or sleep or do whatever you want. Harry hadn't been reading as much as he used to now that he was spending a large portion of every night meditating, so it was a great chance to do so. Harry was about to finish the OWL level material.

One night, Harry was traveling the school, having gotten tired of being a dragon for tonight. He knew that the school was full of secret passageways and hidden rooms. He was trying find a room that no one knew of to use as his room. He didn't sleep much anyway, and

was hoping to keep his stuff somewhere that wasn't in the same room as Ron. No matter how many wards he protected it with.

Whilst roaming, he came upon Fred and George. They seemed to know that he was there (they were hiding behind a statue, one asking the other if Harry was gone), but Harry was invisible, so he wondered how they knew. He asked.

"How did you see me?" They came out from behind the statue in time to see him turn visible.

"A better question is: 'How did you do that?'" said the one on the left.

"I'll tell you if you tell me." They huddled for a moment.

"Fine. Harry Potter, we present you with: The Maurader's Map. Created by the infamous Messrs. Prongs, Padfoot, Moony, and Wormtail, it is a map of the castle and grounds that show everyone within and a fair few secret passageways." Harry was very impressed with the map. He could, of course, draw up a map nearly as complete (barring a few secrets hear and there) but to know where anyone was at any given time would be priceless.

"That's awesome. What do you want for it?"

Thinking he was joking, the one on the right said, "Fund our joke shop for the first year."

Harry thought about it. The twins were very good at their pranking business. He was sure that if he did help them get started on a shop, he could get them making profits very quickly, probably not needing very much more than about six hundred galleons. "Deal."

Both twins were flabbergasted. After a four second pause, they huddled again. This huddle lasted quite a while longer than the last, and Harry suspected that one of them used a privacy charm. Finally, they stood and announced, "We will give you the map and five percent of Weasley's Wizarding Weezies for one thousand galleons." This, Harry recognized, was a much better deal. He stood to make a

profit. He agreed, and the twins promised a contract and the map in the following week.

On the way back to the common room, Harry noticed that one of the walls had a heavier than average concentration of magic within it, a sure sign of a secret room. Harry looked over the wall for half an hour before a door just appeared. Inside was, suspiciously, exactly what he had hoped for: a sitting room with a fireplace, a couch, a recliner, and a desk. He wished he had someone to explain what was going on.

"Excuse me." When Harry turned around, he saw a portrait of a woman dressed in a navy blue dress robe. "Pardon me, but it has been a very long time since someone has come across this room. May I have your name?"

"Harry Potter."

"Delighted. I am Rowena Ravenclaw, and this is my Room of Requirements. I suspected that Salazar had his secret room, so I made one too. I shouldn't have left my portrait here though. Secret rooms don't provide a lot of company." Harry nodded. After getting her to tell him how to work the room, he took her off the wall and carried her up to the owlery. There he obliviated her of both him and of how to get to the Room of Requirements, rapped her up, and mailed her to Dumbledore. They would all three be thrilled.

Chapter 18

"You did WHAT!" shrieked Hermione.

"Woah, Hermione. Chill out."

"Chill out? You took advantage of one of the most important people in history to steal her private sanctuary, and threw away an invaluable, intellectual resource in the process!"

"Hold on. First, that wasn't Rowena Ravenclaw. That was a portrait. A magical copy of her personality, holding only the most basic knowledge about her life. You could learn more about her from *Hogwarts: A History*."

"Oh. Well, you still took advantage of her."

"Secondly, I think we both benefitted from my actions. I get a secure place to keep my stuff, and she gets to spend the rest of her existence in the proverbial hub of the wizarding world, chatting with the most influential wizarding people and portraits in existence. Exactly what she wanted." Harry had a completely innocent look on his face. You could honestly not tell that he didn't give a damn what she wanted.

Hermione huffed. "I doubt she wanted to get Obliviated."

"As do I."

"Well, fine. Anyway, did you ever get around to having your interview with Professor Lupin?"

"Yes, I did. He was sincere when he claimed not to have evil intentions with the up and coming year. He was odd when he was talking to me, though. Rather than act excitable at meeting me, as most do, or athurative, as most professors do, he felt nostalgic. Like I remind him of something," Harry said, thoughtful.

"Hagrid says that you look like your dad. Maybe Professor Lupin knew him."

"That is likely. The stress of his situation would have aged him, prematurely," Harry said, not really paying attention to Hermione.

"What situation?"

"He's a werewolf."

Alarmed, Hermione asked, "What? How do you know?"

"His magic is fiercer than normal, and his boggart was a full moon. Don't worry, though. I'm sure that Professor Dumbledore is aware of it, and has seen to it." That mollified her, as he knew it would.

"You're too smart for your own good." Harry smiled.

"I always was. I used to get in trouble with my teachers for being wittier than was right."

"You mean you were a smart-ass.."

"Tom-ay-to, tom-ah-to. One time, we were learning about the word 'oxymoron.' The example the teacher gave was 'awfully good,' and proceeded to get every student in the class to give an oxymoron; every one of them were nearly identical to hers, being an adverb/adjective combination. It was really bugging me, so for my example I gave 'common sense.' She sent me out of the class while trying desperately not to smile." Hermione was chuckling. "So how was Divination? Can you tell me the answers to the next transfiguration exam?"

"Oh, of course not! And if I could, I wouldn't. But that course is a waste of time. Nothing but stupid superstition."

Harry looked at Hermione oddly. "Then why are you taking it?"

"Because it might look good on my resume should people think I can tell them what is going to happen." Harry rolled his eyes. Just then, the twins rushed up to Harry.

"Harry, my friend. In the excitement last night, we forgot to ask you how you turned invisible." The both had big smiles on their faces, no doubt imagining the mischief they could get into with such an ability. In response, Harry told them to wait there while he fetched Mechanics of Magic. When he returned, he handed it to the one that has spoken and told them to read it.

The twins returned the book the next day, saying that they made a couple copies of it. That day was Harry and Hermione's second Defense class of the year. As promised, Lupin explained the Patronus Charm to the class and demonstrated. He would not, however, continue the lesson because he did not even believe that it was possible for children so young to have the necessary power to complete the spell, and it would just be a waste of time trying to get them to master it. After class, Lupin held Harry back.

"Harry, I still have the boggart, if you want to test yourself." Harry was quick to agree.

When Lupin backed up out of sight of the wardrobe, he spelled it open. At first, Lupin didn't think that anything had happened. Then he realized that the boggart wasn't changing into a scary creature, as it would for most Harry's age, rather it was changing the appearance of the wardrobe itself. He could think of no reason that Harry be afraid of a cupboard. Looking at Harry, he saw that the confident smirking smile that he hadn't seen the boy without had faded into something of a rather hateful frown. But that cleared up in to the confident look almost immediately. Raising his wand, Harry intoned, "Ridiculous!"

From out of the cupboard fell Albus Dumbledore and Minerva McGonagale, whom, it seems, had been engaging in some sort of illicit activity. Both Lupin and Hermione (who had been given permission to stay) broke out into laughter. The boggart retreated into the, now restored, wardrobe.

Still chortling, Lupin said, "Harry, that was splendid. I'm sure that you must have inherited your sense of humor from your father."

Harry replied, "You knew him then?"

"Yes, your father and I were part of a small group of friends at Hogwarts. We called ourselves the Marauders." Recognizing the name, Harry looked into Lupin's eyes. Lupin was reminiscing about his time at Hogwarts, and those thoughts quickly lead to thoughts about Sirius Black's treason. Harry, having witnessed said thought processes, was incensed. Mostly because noone had told him even that there was a good chance that the escaped convict was after him. As well as the fact that it was Sirius Black's fault that his boggart formed the shape it did.

After a little more conversation with Lupin, they left for lunch, where Harry told Hermione what he had viewed. She understood his anger, but warned him not to fall to the lure of the dark side. She then sighed when he didn't get the Star Wars reference, and understood even better just what Sirius Black had taken from Harry.

Days later, Harry signed the contract that the Weasleys presented him with (after reading it thoroughly) and wrote out a bank draft for them.

That night, after his animagus meditation, Harry was really wishing that he could go back in time with the time turner. He knew it had to be an awesome experience, one that Hermione has so far refused to share. Finally, he decided to just do it. He turned him self invisible and started up the girls' staircase. A couple steps up and the whole thing turned into a slide. He would have fallen if he hadn't caught himself with a levitation charm. Levitating himself the rest of the way, he figured that Hermione's dorm would be at the very top, like the boy's dorms. Opening the door, he realized that he was wrong. All the seventh year girls stopped in the middle their underwear pillow fight and looked at the door that had opened of its own accord. Most of them just shrugged and continued, but Harry had to back up into the corridor because one of them decided to close the door.

Going down, he checked the other dorms until he found the third years. Then he took the time turner off of the night stand by Hermione and turned it back one turn.

He found him self, still invisible, in the middle of the Entrance Hall. After about ten minutes of wandering the halls of Hogwarts, Harry

realized that he usually has all night to do this anyway. The novelty of time travel quickly left Harry to his boredom, and he returned the Turner to it's rightful place thirty seconds after having watched it disappear into thin air. 'Time travel is boring.'

Chapter 19

The next day, Harry knew that things were going to be interesting. Especially when he saw Hermione slide down the staircase glaring like a basilisk, at the same time that Professor McGonagall entered the common room looking unhappy.

"Miss Granger, may I have a word with you?" Hermione was now both furious and nervous.

"Yes, Professor. May Harry come, too? I think I know what this is about, and I think he is probably involved."

McGonagall's eyes narrowed. "Then it would probably be wise for him to accompany us."

Harry had been pretending that he couldn't hear them talking while he was reading. When he looked up, he saw two strikingly similar suspicious faces looking at him. "Oh, good morning, Professor McGonagall. I didn't see you come in." She, apparently, decided to play along.

"Of course. Could you follow me, Mr. Potter?"

"Yes, Professor."

After a short walk, they found themselves in McGonagall's office. "Now, Miss Granger, please tell me what you were doing between midnight and one, last night."

"I was sleeping."

"Then why do you think you know what happened?"

"Harry has long held a practice of warding his area of the room out of some sense of misplaced paranoia. Considering that I was going to be in possession of such a valuable object this year, I decided to follow in his example." Harry was at once thankful that he was the best Occlumencer in the room. "They reported that someone snuck

into my area last night, and that while he was in my area, he snuck in again, only to disappear and then leave."

If McGonagall was surprised that these two students were advanced enough to erect wards, she didn't show it. "So someone was in your space in two different places at the same time. Why do you believe this person to be male?"

Hermione answered, "Because the stairs were collapsed this morning."

Harry decided to cut in. "Excuse me, but doesn't that indicate that said male failed to sneak in?"

Hermione shot a glare at him. "Not if he could fly."

"Ah, so you suspect the Quidditch team. I always thought they were a shifty bunch. Especially those twins." McGonagall, who up until this point had been looking at Harry suspiciously, was now seriously considering that the Weasley twins were involved. It seemed like something the troublemakers would do.

Hermione replied, "No, I don't suspect them. They don't know that I have a time-turner. I suspect you!"

Harry was the only one who would be able to know that he wasn't nearly as alarmed as he looked. "Me? But I certainly can't fly. I haven't a broom." McGonagall, who had gone through generations of pranksters and mischief makers, was naturally suspicious of any innocent expression of innocence. However, she would admit that this was by far, the most convincing.

"Well, Miss Granger, I doubt that we will be able to find any proof, one way or the other, of who exactly borrowed your time-turner. However, I believe that they did so without your knowledge or permission. And that they did so, because you would not have given your permission had they asked. Therefore, I will allow you to keep it." Hermione was at once relieved. "However, if it should occur again," now the professor was looking directly at Harry, "I will be

forced to confiscate it, and you will have to change your schedule to fit."

On the walk back to the common room, Hermione asked, "So did you enjoy it?"

"Hell no. I have too much time on my hands, already."

"Good."

Later in the evening, Harry was talking to Fred and George. "I've been thinking, I'd probably be pretty good at this pranking business."

The twins shared a glance. "Well, you are already a co-owner. You looking for a more active career?"

"No, I don't mean R&D. I'm thinking that I could be more of a prank mercenary. Or hit-man. Do you think you could hit me up with some customers?"

George replied, "Hmm. Well, we do get a lot of requests. We haven't really had time for it since we really started working on the shop. We could always send the folks to you. You may need to do some trouble-making free of charge at first, though. Show them your skill."

"That's a good idea. I have been entertaining a few ideas. Thanks guys." Leaving the twins to their spellcrafting, Harry headed down to the kitchen, where he spent thirty minutes choreographing a few cheerful songs and dances that the elves would go through while working.

Halloween came fast, and with it, the first Hogsmead weekend. Harry and Hermione explored the village together with a couple of her friends from Ravenclaw and Luna. Harry's favorite place was the Shrieking Shack. Haunted houses made awesome club houses. He just had to be sure that he leant some exorcism spells before claiming it.

That night, Harry and Hermione enjoyed the feast. Harry was starting to think that they had finally had an unruined Halloween when they

returned to the Fat-Lady portrait. He was miffed that the portrait had hidden rather than immediately found someone to report Black's presence, but decided to forgive her when he found himself lying in a sleeping bag in between Hermione and Luna in the Great Hall. He made some good progress toward animagery that night.

Harry soon decided that he didn't just hate stupid people. He also hated stupid portraits. Like Sir Cadogan. The knight was making hell for everyone in Gryffindor. Harry's first prank client offered to pay five sickles for a pranked portrait. The next night, Sir Cadogan's mouth had been erased while he slept.

A couple of weeks passed. One night, while Harry was gaining an understanding of what it felt like to shoot fire out of his nose (a lot like shooting milk, only it burns more), he felt an odd attack on his mind. Upon introspection, he discovered a link to another mind. He followed it to its source to see a cold stone room, a window that showed a wintry landscape, and a frail looking man with a goatee.

The person who owns the mind asked, "Are you sure?"

"Oh, yes, my lord. The British Ministry just came to me last month with the proposal. It shall be happening at Hogwarts next year, assuming that they can get everyone to agree."

"If this works out, you will have earned your forgiveness. However, I will need tending to in the mean time. You will be too busy."

"I can have the caretaker see to you. I am still very good with the Imperious Curse and I am sure that she cannot fight it."

Harry was then pulled out of the vision when he heard a noise in the common room. Looking up, he saw Sirius Black tiptoeing toward the boy's dormitories. "Hello, Sirius Black."

Black froze. A moment later and he found himself bound to a chair without the knife he had earlier. Looking up, he asked, "Who are you?"

"What, you don't recognize your godson?"

"Harry? Well, you do resemble James, but damn! You look like you're 15!" When Harry just sat there for a few minutes without saying or doing anything, Sirius decided to break the ice. "Um, could you untie me?"

"No, but maybe you could help me with a decision I've been trying to make."

"Sure."

"I wonder whether I should turn you over to the dementors, or just kill you myself." When Sirius realized just how serious Harry was with that statement, he got nervous.

"Neither! Harry, you have to believe me when I say that I am innocent!" Sirius was sure that he was doomed. Harry had somehow incapacitated him without him even seeing Harry draw his wand. He was sure that Harry would never believe him. Then again, Sirius didn't even know what legilimency was, much less that Harry was almost a master at it.

A small "hmm" was all the warning Harry gave before he plunged into Sirius's memories. To Sirius, it was just like being back in Azkaban. He replayed his memories of living at Hogwarts and learning to become an animagus with James, only to have it all ripped away by having to remember Peter's betrayal. He was a bit dazed when it was over, and he only pulled it together when Harry got up and walked up the boy's stairs.

Up in his dormitory, Harry summoned the rat and conjured a cage around it. He made sure that it was very obvious when he cast the unbreakable charm on the cage. Back in the common room, he dispelled the binds on Sirius, but made sure that he couldn't get to Pettigrew.

"But Harry, that little shit is the reason you're a bloody orphan!"

"Yeah, but if you kill him, then you will have no proof of your innocence. Don't be foolish. Now transform and we will go see Dumbledore." On the way there, they ran into Lupin.

"Harry, slowly step away from that dog. I've got you covered, get behind me." In response, Harry just held up the cage. "But...then that means...they switched."

"Yes. We are on our way to the Headmaster's office, if you would care to join us."

"Yes, I'd like that." In the Headmaster's office, there was many a revelation revealed. Eventually the Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, Amelia Bones, was called in, Peter was arrested, and Sirius was free, but required to attend a hearing. Remus told Sirius that he could live at his place since he was living at Hogwarts and Sirius didn't really want to live at his parents' old place. Everything was over just in time for Harry to meet Hermione at breakfast and fill her in.

Chapter 20

"Why does all the interesting stuff happen while I'm asleep?" whined Hermione, after Harry filled her in.

"I don't know. Hey Hermione, how old do I look?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Last night Sirius didn't think I was me because he said I looked like a fifteen-year-old," explained Harry.

"Well, I suppose you do look older than you are. I guess I never noticed."

"Weird. Maybe I'm like a vampire. They age quickly, until they reach their prime."

"Yes, and you do take your sustenance from others, but I don't think that's it. I think it is just that your body was too underdeveloped to handle all your magic, so it fixed it." Hermione liked to argue.

"Maybe."

"Harry, Ron has been talking about inviting us to the Quidditch World Cup in the summer. England is hosting for the first time in a while and he says that his dad can get tickets."

"Did you say no?"

"Well, I kind of do want to go. It would be fun." Harry rolled his eyes.

"Then I'll get us some tickets. VIP seats even. But I'm not going with the Weasleys if it means sharing a tent with Ron. Oh, that reminds me; I had a vision last night."

"Harry, I explained to you that divination was nonsense."

"There is some legitimate divination, Hermione, but that's not what I mean." Harry then went on to explain the connection in his mind and the vision.

"Oh, Harry! That sounds like your mind is connected to Voldemort's! You should tell Dumbledore!"

"I probably will, but it is nothing pressing. I am a capable occlumencer. Besides, I don't think Voldemort knows that we are connected. Otherwise, he would never have dropped guard, even for just a moment, last night."

Hermione conceded. "Alright."

That day, all the students in Hogwarts were escorted down to Hogsmead for a ceremony. Before the ceremony, Harry was called aside by Minister Fudge.

"Harry! They tell me that you are the one who cleared all this up last night! Good show!"

"Thank you, Minister. By the way, what is this ceremony all about?"

"Oh, this is the public apology to Sirius Black for his false incarceration. He is going to be rewarded with half a million gallons. Quite a sum!" Fudge's face lit up with the idea of that much money.

"Minister, Sirius grew up in a wealthy family, but then gave it all up to run away. I don't think he cares about money too much."

"You don't think he'll go along?"

"I don't know. I do know, though, that he enjoys Quidditch."

"Ah, yes! The World Cup is coming up isn't it! I think that is a wonderful idea! He'll get two tickets to the Cup as well!" Fudge was in a positively buoyant mood.

"Yes, some cheerfulness would help to warm the chill of Azkaban. By the way, on the topic of the Cup, I have been wondering how I would go about getting tickets to it?"

"You don't want to go with your Godfather?"

"I have someone I want to bring with me, and I think he has some friends from before that he would like to take."

"Ah, of course. Well, you don't need to worry about little things like tickets, Harry. That's why there is a VIP box. I'll have two seats and a tent reserved for you," replied Fudge in a fatherly fashion.

"Thank you."

The next day, Harry stayed back in Defense Against the Dark Arts.

"Harry that was a good thing you did, sparing Pettigrew. I don't know if I could have done the same."

"Spare him? I thought I sent him away to a lifetime of torture?"

Lupin coughed. "Ah, well, then maybe it wasn't such a great thing. Anyway, was there something you wanted to ask me about?"

"Yes, what does the form of a person's Patronus say about that person?"

"Well, usually the Patronus takes the form of the animal that best represents which ever parent that person views as the protector. For most, it is the father, but for some, like people who have never known their father, it can be the mother. For you, I'd imagine, it would be either your uncle, or your aunt." He seemed to honestly believe that.

"Not likely. Mine is a unicorn, so I guess that that is my mother."

Lupin seemed surprised that Harry had already formed a corporeal Patronus, and asked to see it. When the exhibition was over, he said, "Yes, that would be your mother. More than one person would have

described her as 'pure.' Tell me, why do you think that she is the one you see as your protector?"

"Well, the last time I ever saw her, she was standing in between me and Voldemort." Lupin assumed that Dumbledore had told him this, as he didn't know that occlumencers can remember that far back.

Later, in Transfiguration, McGonagall held Harry back after class. "Mr. Potter, I'm concerned about your performance in class. You always do exceptionally well on the exams, and you are one of the best in the class, but your homework quality has been getting progressively worse," she said, as she handed him his latest essay. It was marked an 'A.'

After looking through it, he asked, "What's wrong with it?"

"What's wrong? Mr. Potter, the assignment was for one and a half feet. That is barely one half of a foot!"

"Well, what did I leave out?"

"Nothing-"

"Was there not enough detail to understand it? It seems perfectly legible to me; very efficient. I've always had good penmanship."

"Yes, Mr. Potter it made perfect sense, but it was simply not long enough. Nor were your last three essays. I understand what you are trying to say, but you really do have to follow the instructions for the assignment. You have the potential to be top of the class, or at least tied with Miss Granger."

"Professor, I know very well why I was placed in your house. It was the only one where I fit all the qualifications. I am clever enough for Slytherin, but I have no ambition. I am loyal enough to my friends for Hufflepuff, but hard work bores me. I am more than intelligent enough for Ravenclaw, but I lack the love of academics for academics' sake that makes the house what it is. I have very little desire to be top of the class, and, unlike most, my Hogwarts marks will probably not

affect my ability to get a job after school. I will not write more than is needed to make my point."

McGonagall, though slightly disappointed, knew that everything he had said was true. Besides, he was easily the most talented magician she had ever taught; it wasn't like he wasn't learning the material. "Very well, but you will still only barely pass like that."

"That's ok."

That night, after his animagus training, Harry decided to get started on that free troublemaking that the twins told him to do. He spent all night conjuring rats. By the time that everyone was awake, the school had a terrible pest problem. Classes were canceled that day because every girl in the school refused to set foot in the corridors. Meals were served in the common rooms. Each house got a stern talking to about pranks and tapestries. Eventually the staff conjured enough cats and snakes (Snape refused to use cats, as he was allergic) to run the rats out of the school. They would eventually fall prey to the woodland creatures. Harry had made them all male, so they wouldn't become some plague.

After McGonagall told them off, the twins made their way over to Harry. "Harry! That was a very good first prank. It was big, so everyone heard of it, and they couldn't pin it on you, so it shows that you can get it done without getting pinched," said Fred.

George added, "And it got us out of class. Always a plus." With that, Fred and George walked off without waiting for him to either confirm or deny any involvement.

Hermione seemed surprised when he told her that he had come through on his promise of top box tickets. Harry couldn't understand why. He was a celebrity. People were supposed to bend over backwards for him.

Chapter 21

Christmas time had come again. Sirius Black spent the holidays at Hogwarts, laughing it up every Gryffindor who stayed.

Christmas Eve, Harry and Hermione ventured up to Dumbledore's office. "Come in, students."

After a bit of small talk, Harry brought up the vision he had seen. Dumbledore asked to see it in a pensieve. Having never seen one before, Harry thought that the pensieve was a spectacular invention. When the memory was over, Dumbledore was remarkably paler.

"Igor, what have you done? And it is already set, too. I won't be able to call it off."

Harry tired of the Headmaster's mumbling, interrupted, "Call what off, sir?" Dumbledore looked at Harry intently.

"There is to be a tournament at Hogwarts next year. It will be an attempt at revitalizing the Tri-Wizard Tournament. The man in your vision was Igor Karkaroff, Headmaster of Durmstrang." 'Oh'

"But Professor -, " started Hermione.

"They're starting the Tournament, again?!" Harry's hair started waving around in his excitement (caused by excess magic).

"You won't be able to enter, Harry. It is unsafe for one as young as you, and you will not be allowed to submit your name to the Goblet." Dumbledore was being remarkably stern, but he wasn't able to deter Harry.

Grinning like a poltergeist, Harry replied, "Try and stop me."

The Headmaster had tried to talk Harry out of the Tournament for ten minutes, with Hermione's help, with no success. Harry had hardly even listened. After seeing the pensieve, Harry had really dived into his Runes class. He had, so far, written it of as an interesting side

project, but after seeing the things of which runes are capable, he started to get especially interested.

For Christmas, Sirius got Harry a new pair of glasses (he was appalled that Harry didn't play Quidditch). They were charmed to turn into corrective sun glasses with a tap of a wand. Hermione got Harry a long brown trench-coat that made him feel like an Old West cowboy, and Hagrid got him a dragon hide gauntlet for Hedwig to perch on (Harry's arm was pretty cut up). Harry also got a number of gifts from the fan club that Ginny had started.

Just before the Christmas break was over, Harry told Sirius that the Weasley twins had given him the Marauder's map and were great fans of his. He promised to send them a letter.

The next semester seemed to pass quickly. Just before the dementors left to return to Azkaban, Harry made a trip to the other side of the wards. He tested his Patronus against five of the demons; then he just started establishing dominance by hunting them down and siphoning energy.

Harry made excellent head way in his animagery and was now in complete control of the dragon in his mind. He'd practice flying and burning, and he did his best to get used to the taste of cow (whole cow). The real surprise was the training in sensory. His readings on animagi indicated that it was at this stage that the person would start to experience heightened senses, even in human state. His eyesight didn't change much up close, but he would see much farther than he could before. More surprising, though, was that his ability to sense magic was suddenly a great deal more detailed. Harry thought that he now knew another reason he had become the first dragon-man: his natural affinity with magic.

As the semester passed, Harry grew increasingly interested in the shape most of the girls were becoming. To him, the school suddenly seemed to have many more girls than it used to. He couldn't figure out where they had all come from, but he was not unhappy with the situation. He spent a lot of time talking and telling jokes. He always seemed to get a laugh.

Hermione, knowing that she wouldn't get invited to the Dursleys, asked Harry to spend the first week of the summer at her house. She insisted that there were just far too many movies that he had to see. After that week, they would go to the World Cup campsite for the fortnight before the Cup (it was, supposedly, just one big party). With Voldemort becoming more active, the Headmaster tried to get Harry to agree to go to the Dursleys, rather than Hermione's, and he explained to Harry that he was protected by blood wards. To which Harry replied, "Blood Wards, Shmlood Shmards."

Dumbledore did, however, convince Sirius to return to his ancestral Home, and to allow Dumbledore to possibly use it as a sort of base if the Voldemort problem grew even worse. That was where Harry was going after the Cup.

At the train station, Harry was introduced to the Grangers. Everything was very cordial. When they arrived at the house, he was shocked to learn that Hermione's sister didn't seem to like either him, or Hermione, at all. Being who he is, he confronted the situation.

"Excuse me, but do you have a problem?"

"What? No, I don't have a problem. I have faith."

Harry just looked confused at that, so Mr. Granger explained, "Before Hermione got her letter, we were a Catholic family. However, we refuse to follow a religion that condemns our daughter to Hell. Especially since it isn't her fault that she is what she is. Jessica, however, continues to believe." Harry didn't believe in a god. At least not a just one. However, he could tell that this was a sensitive issue in this household, so he'd drop it. Hermione changed the subject.

"Harry, are you not going to wear your suppressor?"

"No, I doubt I'll be in danger of accidental magic this summer." The Grangers, confused, asked what a suppressor was. "I am very powerful. Very very. So powerful, in fact, that I'm nearly omnipotent. So sometimes I suppress my power so's not to have accidents." Using the term 'Omnipotent' was probably a bad idea.

"That's it. I can tolerate Hermione's constant studying of her devilry, but this is ridiculous!" 'Well, that didn't last long.' "God is the only all powerful being in the universe!"

Harry looked down, thoughtful. Jessica thought that he was feeling sorry. After a moment, he said, as though coming upon a realization, "You are right." Jessica was now hopeful that she had saved this poor heathen. "I...must be...God!" Just as soon as he said his last word, he created a beam of light around himself, and looked up into the heavens.

Jessica exploded (not literally), "Oh My God! You are so stupid!"

Harry looked scandalized. "Why you blasphemic -"

"You aren't God!"

Here, Hermione jumped in, though she was having a hard time keeping a straight face. "You heretic!"

Jessica started stomping up to Harry, but her parents were holding her back. Harry started acting as though Hermione was holding him back as well.

Jessica screamed, "I swear if you defile God's name one more -"

"What?! You want to try the Omega? I'll go Old Testament on your ass!"

"Try it! I'll burn you at the stake, you satanic little prick!"

"That's it! You are so freaking smote. You better get ready for an eternity in purgatory. Nothing but daytime TV and pinball!" It was at this point that Harry and Hermione cracked up. Neither could hold in their laughter. The adults were clearly hiding smiles, but trying not to take sides. Jessica just stomped up stairs and locked herself in her room.

Harry ended up having to send a letter to the Ministry of Magic explaining that he was the one that did magic at the Grangers, rather

than Hermione. They did the sensible thing by appologising to Hermione and then ignoring all magic coming from that residence for the remainder of the summer.

Hermione hardly let Harry get off the couch the entire week. She had him watching movies the entire time, and she surprised him by watching them with him. He never took her for a couch potato. "Honestly, I never used to spend so much time on recreation. But studying seems so useless when you can control what you remember." After watching Star Wars, and having Hermione explain how huge the fan base was, Harry decided to see if he could use runes to make a light saber so he could sell it to some muggle nerd for millions.

Chapter 22

Harry was thankful that the ministry was excessively wasteful and boastful. They had sprung for an obviously magical and expensive 'tent' for his quidditch stay. It was really just a portable mansion. And, for that reason, Harry's was the place to be for every party. It was during the first party that Harry learned an important lesson: alcohol burns energy. He wondered if he would be allowed medicinal booze at school.

Hermione and Sirius were staying with him, and Remus would be showing up the following week (once the moon had waned). Sirius, at first, was worried that he would be expected to be the authoritative parent figure to Harry, and put an end to the partying, but was relieved to find out that it was a fruitless endeavor.

Luna and her father showed up around the same time as Remus. Harry soon decided that, while Luna was spacey and ridiculous, yet funny and wise, her father was just weird. Still, he was fun at a party.

The Weasleys showed up the day of the match (though the twins had been attending parties for days, now). Mr. Weasley seemed slightly disappointed that he wasn't able to get better seats; he had tried dropping Harry's name, only to find that Harry was already booked.

While they were all walking up to their seats, Harry reflected on his first night at the camp site.

Harry was resting on the sofa with Hermione (both having just discovered that every bedroom was 'occupied'). Harry had spent most of the night dancing and had walked in on many things that taught him some important lessons.

"Hermione, I've made a decision."

"Yes, Harry?" she replied, nearly asleep.

"Before this school year is over, I will lose my virginity."

"That had better not be a proposition."

"Nope. Just a declaration."

"Good. It defeats the purpose of a safety net if you just jump in." They both fell asleep.

Harry was interrupted from his rememberings when a house elf yelled for him not to sit in the seat he was about to sit in. It was then that he noticed that there seemed to be someone sitting there. He couldn't see them, but he could feel them. Their thoughts were odd, though, almost watered down. He was able to tell, though, that the person was fighting a spell that was keeping them from behaving as they would want.

'Could be the Imperius Curse, but there are other compulsion spells. No need to jump to conclusions.' Looking at the elf, Harry asked why he shouldn't sit there.

"Winky is saving that seat for her master." She was hiding her face as she said this, though she was broadcasting her thoughts loud enough that he didn't need eye contact to know that she was afraid of heights.

"And who is your master?"

"Mr. Bartemius Crouch is Winky's master."

Harry then elected to sit in the front row. Sirius wasn't happy to be sharing a row with Lucius Malfoy, but was cordial enough to Narcissa Malfoy. She seemed sincerely pleased to see him out of prison. They were all then distracted by the pre-show entertainment.

"Hermione, remember what I said to you our first night here?"

"About your intentions to lose your virginity this school year?"

"Yes. I am now set on losing my virginity to a veela." Sirius was the proudest godfather in the world. Even Lucius seemed impressed. Hermione and Narcissa both rolled their eyes.

"I don't think that there will any veela at Hogwarts, Harry."

"France has a very high veela population. I think we might get some for the tournament." Harry said this right as Cornelius Fudge walked into the room.

Slightly alarmed, Fudge asked, "How do you know about that?"

Harry just shrugged and said, "Out of my mouth cometh knowledge." That just confused the minister, but set Hermione to giggling.

The game was exciting, but Harry was glad when it was over. He was looking forward to his last night here, and hopefully, his first chance at sexing a veela.

Before that, though, Harry found Mr. Crouch. Harry just introduced himself, and left. With the parting comment that "your son is fighting the spell." Crouch was distressed that Harry had found his secret, grateful that he had given the warning, and anxious about what Harry might want to keep this secret.

Harry's wooing was prematurely interrupted by a bunch of violent drunks. They were hovering a few muggles in the air, making the authorities worry about making them fall. Harry solved that, and impressed the ladies, by transfiguring all the Death Eaters into mattresses. The muggles fell to safety, and Harry got brownie points and an article in the paper.

Sadly, he didn't get laid.

The rest of the summer was spent at Sirius's. As soon as Harry stepped into the house, he felt a familiar sensation. To everyone else, he looked like a dog that just smelled something interesting. They followed him to a case, which he asked Sirius to open. He drained the locket of Voldemort's magic and even managed to leave the magic that wasn't affiliated with the Dark Lord. He then put it in his trunk's second compartment, and vowed to tell the Headmaster about this on the first day of school.

Chapter 23

Two weeks into the school year, Harry remembered his vow. Accompanied by Hermione, Harry paid a visit to the Headmaster.

After describing what he had done to the locket, and that it was almost the same as the diary that had possessed Ginny Weasley, Harry tried to read Dumbledore's face. He seemed to suspect something about the objects, but Harry couldn't get him to voice his suspicions.

Upon leaving the Head's Office, Harry and Hermione ran into Draco. The pureblood had been particularly hateful towards Harry this year, though was still too scared to show it. It turned out that Lucius Malfoy had been one of the Death Eaters that Harry had transfigured into mattresses. His money had kept him from even seeing the inside of a cell, but the embarrassment had lost him his position as a school governor.

Harry was, by now, used to having a new Defence teacher every year, but this year's model had turned out even better than the last. With Lupin doing something or other for Dumbledore, an ex-auror friend of the headmaster's had been called in. Every class ended with a duel. Mad-Eye would choose at random someone to face the winner of the last duel. Harry had won six times in a row.

Flashback

Theodore Nott faced off against Harry and they both bowed. As soon as the duel started, Harry ran in five directions at once (he was using illusions).

With Nott distracted, Harry summoned his shoes and disarmed him.

The next day, Harry was facing Goyle. He used a strengthening charm on his legs and leaped right over the single curse thrown at him and performed a flying karate kick to Goyle's chest.

After that, Harry was pitted against Hermione. As smart as he was, he knew that she was smarter. So ran straight at her while holding a

wandless shield that was strong enough to withstand anything she could throw, and rapped her in a bear hug. She conceded.

His fight against Ron was over when he trasfigured the doofus into a puppy.

Malfoy surrendered before anything happened.

Neville Longbottom almost won by throwing a desk at him and following it up with a stunner. Unfortunately, the stunner hit the now floating desk, and Neville was then encased in ice.

End Flashback

One week before Halloween saw Hermione in the Chamber of Secrets. Harry had graced her with the honor of being the sole witness to the first transformation from Human to Dragon. He was large and in charge. He hit his head on the ceiling. Still, it was fun. That night, Harry flew for hours.

The next morning while reading the paper, Hermione spit her juice all over Seamus, who had been sitting across from her. Just as Harry was about to ask what was up, McGonagall came and asked him to report to the Headmaster's office.

"Mister Potter, I'm afraid that I have some bad news. Your relatives have all been found dead in their home." The Headmaster was looking especially grave.

"Well, how did it happen?" He was, to all appearances, morbidly curious, though he actually just wanted the Headmaster to say it.

"I believe that Lord Voldemort orchestrated it. Now, I know that he was only able to get to them because you didn't recharge the blood wards, but I don't want you to feel guilty. You had no idea that Voldemort could bewitch a dragon. Even I didn't know that."

"A dragon killed my relatives? How did it do that without burning down the neighborhood?" Now Harry seemed appauled.

"Well...A dragon has more ways to kill than just its breath." 'Figures he wouldn't say it.' "Anyways, you are free to choose to be absent from school to attend the funeral, if you wish."

"I probably won't."

When Harry finally got a look at the paper, he almost laughed out loud.

Dursleys Drowned in Dragon Dung

Harry Potter Orphaned Again

The Department of Magical Law Enforcement and The Department of the Control of Magical Creatures are baffled by the events at a residence in Surrey. In the dead of night, a dragon flew to Number 4 Private Drive, home to the only living relatives to the Boy-Who-Lived and well outside of any dragon-safe zones, and ripped the roof off of the house. It then seemed to use the house as a toilet...

Hermione gave Harry a lecture on the respect for all living things, and then another on personal hygiene. Harry could tell that she agreed that it was the most fitting end to the Dursley line.

The representatives from the other schools arrived on Halloween. Harry personally thought that Durmstrang's ship was more impressive than the Abraxan drawn carriage. Still, the French were the ones he was interested in. And he wasn't disappointed, either. The last one to leave the carriage, besides the half-giant Headmistress, was definitely a veela.

That evening, the Headmaster put the Goblet of Fire on display and explained that everyone over seventeen had twenty-four hours to enter their name. Harry already knew how he was going to get around the age line.

Later that night, Harry and Hermione were sitting in the commonroom when Hermione noticed that Harry was a little distracted. As though he was trying to be in two places at once.

Melissa Marcrow was walking through the corridors of Hogwarts. To the objective observer, it would appear as though she had just realized that she had breasts. She almost couldn't stop herself from touching them. It's probably the only thing that stoped Filch from bothering her as he saw her pass by. 'You look like a lady! Oh, oh yeah. You look like a lady.' Once in the Great Hall, she put a piece of paper in the Goblet. It said Harry Potter, Hogwarts.

'Obliviate.'

When Harry seemed to come to himself, Hermione asked, "So what was that all about?"

"I just officially became a Master Legilemencer." When Hermione realized what he ment, she decided to go to bed. The only reason she had stayed up so late was to try to stop him from entering himself into the tournament.

Fred and George had tried to use a potion to age themselves to get past the age-line. Once Harry saw their beards, he cast an aging charm on himself and jumped across the line. When he had a beard as well, he changed his robes to midnight blue with red polka-dots and trasfigured his glasses into half-moon glasses. The headmaster accepted the offered lemon drop.

Later in class, Harry was being griped at by McGonnagal.

"Mr. Potter, the continued existance of the beard aside, I cannot allow you to continue to flout the dress code. And, no. I will not refer to you as Harry the Grey."

"Come on, Professor. I'm referencing an incredible piece of literature here."

"No, Mr. Potter. Now return to school uniform or you shall not... or you shall fail." Harry cracked a smile at that.

"Come on; say it Professor."

She rolled her eyes, but relented, "Return to uniform or you shall not pass!" Harry giggled and clapped like a child.

The Headmaster abruptly cut off his speech as the Goblet's fire turned blue. When a strip of paper flew out, he caught it deftly.

"The champion of Durmstrang shall be... Victor Krum!" The audience cheered until the Goblet turned blue again.

"The champion of Beauxbatons shall be... ..Fleur Delacour!" The male audience cheered until the goblet turned blue again.

"The champion of Hogwarts shall be... ..Harry Potter." The young audience cheered as Harry walked into the side room, but many of the older students looked a bit miffed.

Inside the antechamber, Harry immediately made his way over to Fleur. [Hello.

Fleur smiled as she introduced her self. [Hello. I presume you are the Hogwarts champion?

[Yes. I am Harry Potter. Her eyes widened at that.

[Really. I was under the impression that Harry Potter was too young for this tournament.

[I am, but if they didn't want me to enter, then they should have made it harder to do so. Their conversation was interrupted then as the headmasters of the three schools, as well as a whole horde of other people entered the room and made their way directly to Harry.

Dumbledore was the first to speak. "Harry, how many times did you enter your name into the cup?"

Harry thought that was an odd question. "Just the once. Why? Would it had helped my chances if I had done it more than once?"

"It shouldn't have. But your name came out of the Goblet again after you left the Hall." "I guess that Karkaroff wanted me in this thing."

Madam Maxim decided to make her voice heard. "This is outrageous! The boy is much too young to compete! I will not allow it!"

Dumbledore replied, "I'm afraid that there is nothing any of us can do about it. Isn't that right, Barty?"

Mr. Crouch actually did know a loophole that could get Harry out of the tournament, but when he looked into Harry's eyes, he knew that it would be better to just let him compete. No reason to upset the only person who knew his darkest secret, after all.

When it was all said and done with, Harry parted ways with Fleur at the Entrance Hall. They had been told that the first challenge will be a test of courage, so they would not be told what it is. Harry was fine with that and didn't even look into anyone's mind to find out what he'd be facing.

He and the rest of the Gryffindors partied all night.

Several weeks later, the champions were all gathered in an unused classroom. There was a reporter there who seemed to want to get Harry off on his own, but Harry was ignoring her presence completely. She tried to literally drag him off, only to find herself stunned and left in a corner with her equally stunned photographer.

The Weighing of the Wands ceremony took nearly two hours to complete. Luckily, there were donuts and drinks available. Ollivander was impressed with how well kept Harry's wand was. He said that most children didn't bother polishing them. Harry could understand that. The only reason he polished his was out of boredom. When the photo session was set to start, Ludo Bagman offered to be the one to hold the camera.

No one woke Rita or Bozo, even when they left the room.

Harry was doing a spectacular job distracting Fleur from her nervousness. She seemed to know what she was going to face in the

task, and was terrified. Harry thought that the best thing he could do for her was hit on her. She agreed to accompany him to Hogsmead the next day, assuming that they were both still alive.

Finally, Bagman entered the tent and told them to pull something out of a bag. When Harry realized that they were dragons, he couldn't blame Fleur for her nervousness, though he didn't feel it himself. Even though his was the nastiest one. He also decided against revealing his animagus to everyone (especially after his trip to the Dursleys).

"AND FINALLY: HARRY POOOOOOTTEEEER!"

Harry strolled out of the tent looking for all the world as though a giant dragon with a spiky tail was nothing to worry about. He was smiling and waving at the audience. When he entered the arena, he waved his wand over his head and conjured full plate armour on his person, complete with a sword in his left hand. The crowd ate it up.

"HA! HE SURE LOOKS UP TO THIS DOESN'T HE?! HOWEVER, I'D LIKE TO REMIND MR. POTTER THAT HE ISN'T ALLOWED TO SLAY THE DRAGON." At this, Harry gave an exaggerated, disappointed snap of his fingers. Then he flicked his wand and all the metal from his armour and sword melting and compiled into a blob at the end of his wand. As he walked toward the dragon, he'd flick the wand again with each step, and the blob would grow.

When he got within the dragon's fire range, it took a great breath and sent a steady stream of fire at him. He just raised his wand and the metal fanned out to make a giant metal umbrella that protected him from the fire. When the dragon was out of breath, the metal flew from his wand and rapped around the dragon's head. It passed out from want of air within moments, and Harry vanished the metal. Then, as the dragon struggled to regain consciousness, Harry plucked up the golded egg, and sent a banisher at the ground, which sent him flying through the air toward the arena entrance, where he fired a cushioning charm for his landing.

Not even Karkaroff could avoid giving him a high score.

Chapter 24

Harry and Fleur managed to go out several times during the next months. However, the problem with veela is that they are all used to guys falling all over themselves for them. Harry quickly learned that that can result in an unpleasant dating experience. And it makes it almost impossible to get them to put out.

Still, Harry was determined, and he knew that even Fleur would not be immune to the natural tendency girls have to swoon at a ball. He was right.

The next day.

"Harry, there you are. What time did you come in last night?" Hermione asked. Before Harry could answer, Hermione had gotten a look at his shirt. It was a t-shirt, where-on an image of Fleur was holding a sign that said "I had sex with Harry Potter". She was holding it in such a way that it covered up her apparent nakedness. "Harry! That shirt is completely inappropriate! Is it even true?"

"Of course it's true. You didn't expect me to give up on my vow, did you?"

Hermione sighed. "Harry, it is completely callous and classless to parade the fact that you seduced a girl like some kind of trophy."

"I know that Hermione. I wouldn't be doing it if I wasn't completely aware that I'm as much a trophy for her as she is for me. In fact, it is mostly for that reason that we broke up just moments ago."

"You dumped her as soon as you got dressed, didn't you?"

"Pretty much. It's kind of annoying going out with someone who refuses to put any effort into making you happy, just because she's used to being waited on."

"Yeah, I'm sure you know all about that."

"Yes. I do."

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Over the course of the next couple of months, Headmaster Dumbledore searched to countryside for what he finally confided into Harry were horcruxes. Finally, in the beginning of February, he found one in the ruins of what he told Harry was once the Gaunt house. When he picked up the ring, however, he noticed a specific design on the stone. Almost without thinking about it, he started to put it on.

Only to have it fly out of his hand and into Harry's. Alarmed, Dumbledore nearly shouted, "No! Harry, return that to me. You have no idea what it means!"

Without even looking up, Harry just said, "In a minute." He then was careful to only drain Voldemort's magic from the thing, while leaving the intense, but odd magic that he could tell was much older. When that was done, he tossed it back to Dumbledore who caught it almost reverently. The headmaster seemed to be in a rush to return after that.

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Two weeks later was the second task. Harry had figured out the clue the very night he first opened the egg. Even though he hadn't yet gotten to mermish in his language class, he did at least recognize it.

He was slightly put off when Hermione never showed up to wish him luck, nor did he even see her in the stands. His hurt feelings turned into slight anger as the champions were informed that hostages had been taken.

When the whistle sounded, Harry watched as Krum failed to transfigure himself into a shark, and Fleur crafted a bubble around her head. Once they were both in the water, Harry flicked his wand and a beam rose out of the water near the middle, Harry knew it to come from Hermione.

Holding both of his arms in front of himself, Harry slowly moved them apart. As they parted, so did the water. With the audience in awe,

Harry levitated himself down to the end of the narrow corridor and reached into the water, pulling out Hermione. As they floated up to the judges' area, the water filled in behind them, and Hermione was warmed by the drying and heating charms Harry had cast.

Back at the shore, there was a small incident. The judges approached Harry and Dumbledore asked, "Mr. Potter, why did you chose to rescue Ms. Granger, rather than your own hostage?"

"If Hermione wasn't my hostage, then who was?"

"Ronald Weasley. He confided in Professor McGonagall that he was your best friend."

"Headmaster, if I had to choose between saving Ron and anyone else in the world, I'd choose the other person."

"I see. Well, I hope Mr. Krum saves Ron then." Krum did not, in fact. Fleur returned having saved no one, and Krum decided to save the little girl rather than the dude he didn't know.

No one saved Ron.

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One month later, after a particularly exciting night with Cho Chang (which she made him swear not to tell her boyfriend Cedric about), Harry was on his way to Gringotts with Sirius.

Once seated in an account manager's office, Sirius said, "I'd like to officially make Harry Potter my heir."

Kashyyyk, the account manager replied, "Of course, you realize that the only reason you are currently in command of the Black family gold is because you are the only one from the immediate family left. Due to your status as a Black cast out, to define an heir would automatically pass everything to said heir." They did know this, and it was for that reason exactly that they were doing this. For some reason, cast out status did not pass on to the heirs of the cast out.

Which meant that doing this would make Harry head of the Black family.

"Yes, I am aware."

When everything was taken care of, and Harry was head of the family, he immediately said, "I am now reinstating Sirius Black, Andromeda Tonks, and Nymphadora Tonks into the family." (Harry actually had no idea who the last two were, but Sirius apparently liked them.) "I am also setting up trust accounts for each with a ten thousand galleon allowance per year."

When that was done Harry brought up the next order of business. "I'd like to claim ownership of a subfamily account that has no legal owner."

Kashyyyk had expected this and just asked, "Which one?"

"The LeStrange account. Being that Bellatrix LeStrange was a Black, we have first rights now that every member of that family is serving a lifetime sentence."

Once the goblins confirmed that that was indeed the case, Harry and Sirius were lead to the vault. Once there, Harry noticed another instance where a bit of the dark lord's soul was stuck inside an object. Harry collected the cup, noticing its Hufflepuffness, and drained Voldemort's magic.

He later told the Headmaster all about it.

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A week before the third task, Harry was sitting with Hermione in the Room of Requirements.

"So there are supposedly seven horcruxes?" asked Hermione.

"Yep. Riddle himself, Nagini, Hufflepuff Cup, Slytherin locket, Gaunt ring, diary, and Ravenclaw...something." (They had seen the snake in one of Harry's visions.)

"Well, how are we supposed to find the last thing if we don't even know what it is? We need that horcrux." Just as Hermione said that last sentence, Ravenclaw's diadem appeared on the table between the two.

Harry, after draining the horcrux out of the diadem, loudly said, "We need a million galleons." Nothing happened. "Damnit."

XDXDXDXDXDXDXD

Finally it was time for the third task. Everyone was excited, though there was nary a doubt in anyone's mind who'd win.

Harry, being the first to get to enter the maze, decided that walking was too slow. So he conjured a lion and rode in, much to the audience's enjoyment. The audience was, in fact, enjoying watching Harry throughout the entire maze as he defeated one obstacle after another (there were three big screens above the maze; one to show each champion). He had to turn around more than once, but he had such a head start and was moving so quickly that it didn't matter.

Finally he got to a sphinx, but rather than try to figure out the riddle, he jumped off the lion and sent it to fight. Running ahead he reached the final corridor, at the end of which was the Cup. He was a little winded, so he chose to walk, rather than run. With each step, though he was leaving a foot-print of fire. After a few steps, he could see an acromantula climb over the hedge to escape the flames. Just as he was about ten steps away from the cup, he heard both Fleur and Krum cast the extinguishing charms, but they were too late.

He grabbed the cup and was immediately transported to a graveyard. He was able to deflect the stunning and immobilizing curses that had been sent at him, and blew up the snake he could see near one of the tombs.

"No! Give me that wand you useless puppet!" Voldemort was struggling to take the wand from the caretaker that Karkaroff had provided.

Just as the imperioused fellow was going to hand the wand to the Dark Lord, he heard Harry shout, "Devil Baby!" The caretaker could certainly understand that sentiment considering how Voldemort looked. However, just then the "devil baby" began to squirm so feverishly that the caretaker accidentally dropped him. Right in time to receive the killing curse where Voldemort used to be.

Harry, seeing that he missed yelled again, "Die, Devil Baby!" Just as Voldemort was about to grab the caretaker's dropped wand, it went up in flames. As did everything in the immediate vicinity. Within moments the dark lord was again a mere shade. Seeing that, Harry tried one of the exorcism spells he had learned back when he thought the Shrieking Shack was haunted. Though Voldemort screamed in pain, he didn't disperse. However, Harry did feel a pull at the scar on his forehead. Realizing that there was one more horcrux, Harry did the only thing that made sense. He absorbed the foreign magic into his own core, and exorcised the dark lord.

Picking up the Triwizard cup, Harry was transported to the winner's circle of the tournament. He had been gone so shortly that most people hardly noticed.

Epilogue

One Tuesday evening, the Minister of Magic and Supreme Mugwump were waiting at a table in the Leaky Cauldron for the Headmaster of Hogwarts for their weekly lunch. Five minutes late, Headmaster Harry Potter arrived.

"Sorry I'm late, fellas. Was working with Hermione for her press release this afternoon."

The Minister laughed it off. "Not at all, Harry. We both know how much you have been looking forward to this. You have spent most of the last fifty years helping Hermione with her little project. And I can certainly understand why. I have to tell you that it has been great to be the youngest minister in history. I think I am going to have to make sure that there is never another Minister of Magic over 50 years old."

The Mugwump was less than amused. "Oh, shut the fuck up, Tom. Being old sucks. Whats worse is that I know that I am the only one here who will always be old. You both suck."

Harry and Tom couldn't help but laugh at their old friend. Harry replied, "Sorry Richard. We know that you're sensitive. The Wizengamot rarely has any members under 70, much less their leader. But of the three of us, you are the one with the most free time. You could always look into developing new and exiting potions and methods to make old age more comfortable."

"Bah. I'm just glad that old crone, Marshbanks finally croaked. What was she? Four hundred?" complained Richard.

Minister Tom said, "Nearly. At least now you don't have to hear about our awesome N.E.W.T.s any more."

Harry remembered hearing Madam Marshbanks brag during his O.W.L.s that Dumbledore had done things with a wand during his N.E.W.T.s that she had never seen before. So naturally, when it came time for his N.E.W.T.s, he made sure to do things that she had never seen without a wand. She didn't stop bragging about that until she died.

"Alright, Mr. Potter, your turn," called Madam Marshbanks. When he arrived at the starting point, she explained, "This is your practical transfiguration exam. This year, we decided on an obstacle course. Make it from here to the finish line using nothing but transfiguration. Begin."

Harry immediately began to jog toward the goal. Marshbanks was confused when he didn't even pull out his wand, and more confused when he didn't appear to notice the pool of water that he was coming upon. She was astonished when, instantly upon contact with his foot, the water was transfigured into a floating wooden block. Harry made to the other side of the pool leaving seven wooden foot prints in the pool.

When Harry got to the next obstacle, a chasm, he transfigured some absolutely huge wings onto his back and flew right across.

Marshbanks was terrified when Harry got to the next obstacle and didn't do anything to stop the wall from coming together and smushing him. When the walls separated, she was awed to see a steel statue of Harry in his place, and the flabbergasted when the statue continues to jog toward the finish line with a chunk chunk chunk.

The final obstacle of the test was a simple chain length fence. Harry didn't even slow down. As soon as he smashed into it he splashed into about six liters of water on the other side, which rapidly reformed into a fully human Harry Potter, who stepped over the finish line.

Stunned and impressed, Madam Marshbanks could do no less than give him as high a score as has ever been received. And a standing ovation.

Fifty years later, Harry was ready to start to live seriously. Or as much as someone who never takes anything seriously can. He was ready to run for minister.

It was a short campaign, really. As soon as the people realized that he was in the running, he was voted into office.

He quit after one term.

To the public, he gave the reason that he was looking for something meaningful to do with his life, and that after a year in office, he realized that being Minister wasn't it.

The truth was that he had already accomplished what he had intended to do when he had taken the position. He had turned the Signate Ring of the Minister of Magic into a horcrux.

Five years later, he had done the same to the Ring of the Chief Warlock.

In the most recent fifty years, or so, several of the less reputable papers had commented on the conspiracy theory that the Ministry of Magic controlled a dragon that they used to take care of detractors. No one, of course, gave this theory the time of day. Which was a shame, since it was true.

Ever since Harry had flown to Malfoy Manor, taken a deep breath, and blew down the length of their chimney. He huffed and he puffed and he burned their house down.

As it stood now, Harry was Headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry (one of the cushiest jobs in Wizarding Britain) and he had two horcruxes (one of which was the Minister of Magic, the other the Supreme Mugwump). He ruled Britain. Hell yeah.

As he sat enjoying how things had turned out, he was rather rudely snapped out of his thoughts by the Chief Warlock. "Hey! Wake the hell up. It's time for Hermione's speech."

After thanking Chief Dick, Harry hurried out the back to Diagon Alley, and up next to his oldest friend on the raised stage.

Seeing that Harry had arrived, Hermione started, "Wizards and Witches of Britain! Today I come to you in celebration of one of the greatest achievements of all time! I, with the help of my good friend Harry Potter, have succeeded in creating a Philosopher's Stone!"

The crowd just went nuts. When it had calmed down enough, she started taking questions.

"Daily Prophet; how long did it take for you to accomplish this, Ms. Granger?"

Hermione, with a smile firmly in place for the cameras, replied, "Nearly sixty years. I have put most of my life so far into this, but I am vindicated with the knowledge that I will get all that time back. Plus as much as I want."

"Healers Quarterly; do you plan to share this achievement with St. Mungos'?"

"No."

And so the questions continued in this vein. Eventually Hermione stopped the questioning and said, "Now to commemorate my achievement, I will drink the first dose of the elixer of life from my stone."

The crowd watch excitedly as Hermione took a long drink from what appeared to be an over sized test tube. When it was three quarters of the way empty, she started coughing at the blood like taste.

Everyone watched as she seemed to lose eighty years of age. When she was done, she looked like she was in her twenties again.

Harry, seeing her still coughing, looked at the elixer that was now in his hand. He glanced at the crowd, glanced left, then right. Then he drank the rest of the elixer.

The audience laughed. They laughed some more when Hermione realized what Harry had done and chased him off the stage.

Hermione and Harry were relaxing back at Hogwarts, rehashing an old argument.

"I've told you Harry. I won't create a horcrux. I won't take a life. Besides, now that we have the stone, why would I need to?"

"Hermione, the stone can be stolen, or destroyed. I just think you'd be safer if you had a back up. Besides, I'm not asking you to kill someone. I've figured something else out."

"Really? Well, lets hear it."

"Well, it actually goes back to the process that horcruxes were derived from. The Soul Jar. It is the process of anchoring your soul to an object. The original problems with this method were that you had to have the object on your person at all times. That seemed to actually make ones life more fragile. It also was unable to stop the body's aging, or death and deterioration, leading to what we would think of as liches."

"Harry, I'm not going to become a lich."

"I'm not asking you to. Look, I've got it all figured out. You shape the stone into the shape of a human heart and animate it to function as a prosthetic heart. Then you switch it out for your real heart. Then you turn it into a phylactery, or soul jar. It's your heart, so, you know, it can't be stolen (at least, not easily). And it will be pumping the elixer through your blood, so that will keep you from dying and becoming a lich!"

Hermione thought about it and decided that it couldn't hurt to check it out.

They made another stone so that Harry could have Elixir of Life blood, too.

And Harry never married Ginny Weasley, and he lived forever, and ruled the world and was awesome.

The end.

A. N.: Okay, so here you go. Maybe this is a better ending than my previous "Rocks fall" one. Stop bitchin'.

P. S. I don't play D & D. I know I probably screwed that lich crap up. Fuck it. Also, the person who was elected Minsiter was not named Tom, and the person who was named Chief Warlock was not named Richard. Those are the names that the horcruxes go by with people in the know. Tom, Dick, and Harry.